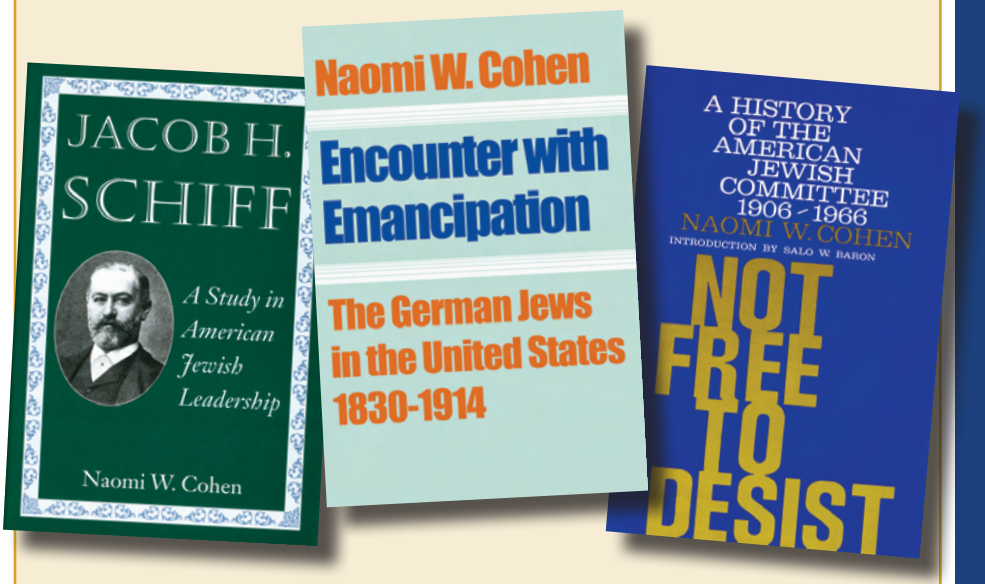
The American Jewish Archives Journal

IN CELEBRATION OF Naomi W. Cohen



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Cincinnati • New York • Los Angeles • Jerusalem

Dr. David Ellenson, President

On the cover:
From left to right: The covers of three of Naomi W. Cohen's influential works: Jacob H. Schiff: A Study in American Jewish Leadership *(Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press, 1999),* Encounter with Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States, 1830–1914 *(Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1984), and* Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee, 1906–1966 *(Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1972).*
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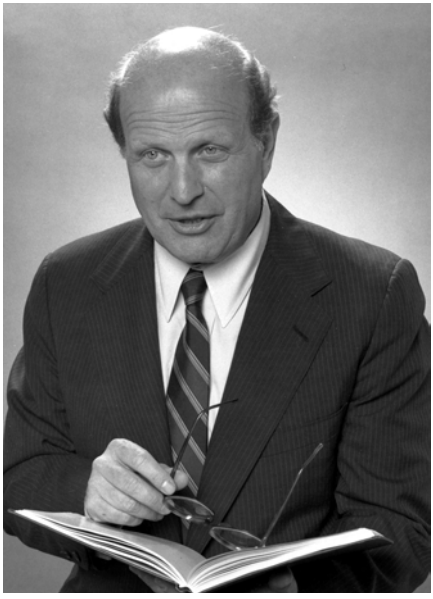
We mourn the passing of
our beloved teacher, patron, and friend

Dr. Alfred Gottschalk (1930–2009)

President, HUC-JIR (1971–1995)
Chancellor (1996–2000)
Chancellor Emeritus (2001–2009)



No rabbi commanded greater respect
and awe than 'mori v'rabi',
my teacher and my Rabbi...
Alfred Gottschalk.
His death leaves us bereft and forlorn.
His life was a remarkable one,
and his accomplishments legendary.

Rabbi David Ellenson
Eulogy for Dr. Gottschalk, 14 September 2009

TO OUR READERS...

In 1986, the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) published a delightful "Tribute Volume" to commemorate the ninetieth anniversary of Jacob Rader Marcus's birth. The booklet's editors invited dozens of Marcus's friends, colleagues, and disciples to write a 150-word response to the question: "What was the most memorable lesson I learned from Jacob Rader Marcus?" Dr. Naomi W. Cohen, then a professor of history at Hunter College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, was one of the many eminent scholars who happily contributed to this distinctive compilation of "Marcusian" lore. Cohen's entry reads as follows:

> As a young graduate student I visited the American Jewish Archives some thirty-five years ago. There I met Jacob Marcus for the first time. I shall never forget his warm welcome, his gracious hospitality, and his keen interest in my research. He went out of his way to put necessary materials at my disposal. By his behavior, he taught me that a teacher's encouragement of students consists of treating their work with the same enthusiasm and seriousness that he brings to his own.[1]

The story behind this special tribute edition of *The American Jewish Archives Journal* (*The AJAJ*) authenticates the veracity of Cohen's testimonial to Marcus on his ninetieth birthday. Indeed, it was her own students and disciples who first urged the editors of this journal to develop a thematic issue wherein Cohen's important contributions to the field of American Jewish history could be appropriately highlighted. The achievements of which her colleagues spoke transcended her well-deserved reputation as a meticulous and productive scholar. In fact, the primary impetus for honoring Cohen's work came upon the recommendation of those whom she has generously mentored over the decades. For all those who contributed to this special issue, Cohen has consistently been a teacher who treated their work with the same enthusiasm and seriousness that she brought to her own.

The proposal that *The AJAJ* honor Cohen took hold immediately. As a pioneering scholar of the American Jewish experience, Cohen's frequently cited volumes are considered by most colleagues to be essential reading. It is also important to note that, for more than a half century, Cohen has been a loyal friend and enthusiastic patron of the American Jewish Archives (AJA). Over the decades, she has commended the AJA's holdings to researchers and doctoral students. She remains one of the AJA's most loyal boosters and generous benefactors. For all of these reasons, it seemed quite fitting to have the AJA's journal fête Naomi Cohen.

One of Cohen's colleagues at Hunter College, Dr. Robert M. Seltzer—himself a graduate of HUC-JIR and a member of The Marcus Center's Academic

Advisory and Editorial Board—conceptualized this volume and, to a large extent, served as its executive editor. It was Seltzer who identified and invited the distinguished contributors to participate in this special publication. We are also indebted to *The AJAJ*'s capable managing editor, Dr. Dana Herman, who worked diligently with Seltzer to ensure that this tribute volume appeared in a timely fashion. Our readers will enjoy reading the fruits of their collaborative labors.

Stephan F. Brumberg, a distinguished historian of Jewish education in the United States, honors his colleague with an essay that traces the evolution of Jewish education in New York City during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century. Prior to the Civil War, Jewish immigrants had abandoned their interest in parochial schools in favor of public school education, despite the school system's Protestant influence. Many Catholic immigrants, on the other hand, preferred parochial education. Brumberg explains why "different faith communities react[ed] differently to the changing education sector of New York City."[2]

Genealogists and students of the German Jewish experience in America will benefit from reading Kenneth Libo's article on the Obermayer family. As Libo points out, the Obermayers were never full-fledged members of the vaunted German Jewish aristocracy about which much has been written. Instead, the history of the Obermayer family offers us a case study on how German Jewish immigrants who were "not quite 'Our Crowd'… evolved in America."[3]

Two of our contributors, Robert M. Seltzer and Shuly Rubin Schwartz, unlock valuable historical information that is frequently found in the much underutilized treasure trove of Hebrew primary source materials. It is important to note that Seltzer cleverly manages to pay tribute simultaneously to Jacob Marcus and Naomi Cohen by retrieving, revising, and publishing an article he wrote fifty years ago as a term paper for Marcus's course on American Jewish history at HUC-JIR. Seltzer examines articles on life in America that appeared in the Hebrew journal, *Ha-Zefirah*, published in Warsaw. Focusing his study on the years leading up to the onset of the mass migration of Russian Jews to America, Seltzer identifies a growing spirit of disillusionment among the journal's contributors—members of the Jewish intelligentsia whose hope for a new social order for Russian Jews began to fade after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881.

Schwartz explores the Americanization struggles of a Hebraist and Russian *maskil* named Aron Shimon Shpall, the author's great-grandfather. Translating and explicating several of Shpall's Hebrew correspondence—letters that have remained in her family's possession for many years—Schwartz sheds new light on the career of this interesting devotee of Hebrew culture, who doggedly struggled to preserve Jewish life and maintain Hebrew literacy despite the debilitating counter-effects of American culture.

Alice Nakhimovsky and Roberta Newman contribute a fascinating comparative study on three American *brivnshtelers*—manuals that contained templates of Yiddish letters. These template manuals were used by Yiddish writers who struggled to compose "letters of all types—courtship, business, social, and family." In contrast to the *brivnshtelers* written in Europe, American *brivnshtelers* addressed themselves to the needs and concerns of the eastern European Jewish immigrant generation. As Newman and Nakhimovsky demonstrate, these American *brivnshtelers* illuminate "the diverse attitudes, ideologies, and experiences of the American Jewish immigrant community at the turn of the twentieth century."[4]

Jeffrey S. Gurock, one of the leading historians of Orthodoxy in America, provides readers with a probing analysis of Jewish ethnicity in New York City during the interwar period. Gurock emphasizes that, during this particular period, the Jews of New York overwhelmingly lived on top of one another, "bumping into each other incessantly." Having examined numerous autobiographies and oral histories relating to this era, Gurock notes that those who grew up in one of New York's Jewish neighborhoods "felt that their entire world was well-nigh Jewish."[5] Gurock goes on to explore the numerous paths that these New York Jews pursued once they were old enough to strike out on their own. Some fled this massive Jewish cauldron and passionately embraced the nation's general culture; others were determined to preserve their distinctively Jewish enclaves. Despite attrition, these Orthodox communities endured and, ultimately, found reinforcements among the immigrants who arrived during and after World War II.

Evaluating American Jewry's response to the impending destruction of European Jewry during the 1930s and, subsequently, to the onset of the Holocaust itself has engendered one of the most contentious historiographical debates in all of American Jewish history. Did American Jews do all they could to save their European coreligionists? Historians have produced contending responses to this question. Steven Bayme contributes an insightful and thoroughgoing analysis of this historiographical controversy. He begins by noting that Naomi Cohen, in her volume on the history of the American Jewish Committee (AJC)—*Not Free to Desist*—argued that AJC's leadership took the threat of Nazism seriously.[6] According to Cohen, these communal leaders did their best under the circumstances. Since these leaders were "children of the Enlightenment," their intellectual underpinnings disallowed them from fully comprehending the dimensions of the evil they faced.[7] Bayme's lucid overview provides readers with an extremely useful analysis of the various positions that historians have taken in their efforts to evaluate American Jewry's performance during that tragic era. As for Cohen's contention that American Jewish leaders did their best, Bayme concludes that her analysis still merits serious scholarly

consideration because it was based on a historical reconstruction that was contextualized, comprehensive, and fair-minded.

The honoree's own contribution to this issue illustrates how these very same scholarly principles continue to inform her methodology. Cohen's essay on William Williams (1862–1947), the commissioner of immigration at Ellis Island from 1902 to 1905 and 1909 to 1913, constitutes a new interpretive analysis of American Jewry's negative estimation of this controversial bureaucrat's work. Williams's public assertions and his official policies frequently put him at bitter odds with American Jewry. Cohen confirms that his racist opinions and unabashed aversion to the masses of immigrants arriving from southern and eastern Europe have led many to insist he was an antisemite. In the final analysis, however, Cohen insists that Williams "was not an antisemite." Like most of those in the American uppercrust of the Progressive era, Williams had prejudices and biases. Yet, as Cohen reminds us, these predispositions were hardly atypical. Williams was no different from men like Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft—the U.S. presidents who appointed him—in that he possessed the opinions and aversions of an American "patrician," but nevertheless "personal tastes did not interfere with their political and professional associations."[8]

The scholarly contributions in this tribute volume enhance our knowledge of the American Jewish past, and this fact alone is a fitting tribute to the career of our venerable honoree. Considered as a totality, the essays in this volume constitute a scholarly bouquet that is presented as a token of our affectionate gratitude for the tireless efforts of a dedicated teacher and beloved mentor.

During the course of a newspaper interview that was given in anticipation of his eighty-fifth birthday, Simon Wolf—a prominent lawyer and Jewish communal leader—shared his philosophy on life:

> I'm opposed to flowers for the dead. I'm opposed to all expensive funerals. Some people bankrupt themselves for it. I'd rather have a stick of taffy while I'm living than a column of epitaffy when I'm dead.[9]

All of us at The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives are pleased to present Naomi W. Cohen with a well-deserved "stick of taffy."

G.P.Z.
Cincinnati, Ohio

Notes

[1]Abraham J. Peck and Jonathan D. Sarna, *Biz Hundert un Tsvantsik! A Tribute Volume for Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus on the Occasion of his 90th Birthday* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, 1986), 9.

[2]Stephan F. Brumberg, "The Education of Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic Children in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York City," 13.

[3]Kenneth Libo, "Not Quite 'Our Crowd,'" 44.

[4]Alice Nakhimovsky and Roberta Newman, "'Free America,'" 74.

[5]Jeffrey S. Gurock, "The Depth of Ethnicity," 146.

[6]Naomi W. Cohen, *Not Free to Desist* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1972).

[7]Steven Bayme, "American Jewish Leadership Confronts the Holocaust," 163.

[8]Naomi W. Cohen, "Commissioner Williams and the Jews," 121.

[9]"Simon Wolf at 84 Years; Lawyer, Philantropists [*sic*], Public Man and Friend of Many Presidents of the United States," *The New York Times* (23 October 1921): 85.

Photo of Naomi W. Cohen
(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

Photo of Naomi W. Cohen
(Courtesy Jeremy Cohen)

Naomi W. Cohen as Teacher and Scholar

American Jewish history as a recognized academic field was inaugurated by Jacob Rader Marcus and a few others not much more than six decades ago. Naomi Wiener Cohen is one of the most distinguished contributors to it. She has produced a substantial oeuvre on the American Jewish past based on impeccable research, disinterested scholarship, and a deep connection to the Jewish people and Judaism. She did so while a full-time faculty member with few sabbaticals and many years of devoted service to her department.

Jack Wertheimer of The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) was one of the students in her graduate seminar at Columbia University. (Other members of that seminar, students who studied with her at Hunter College, and others who teach at The City University of New York [CUNY], have contributed to this special issue of *The American Jewish Archives Journal*.) He characterizes her achievement as follows:

> The overarching theme of Naomi W. Cohen's research has been the ongoing and evolving efforts of American Jews to organize. She has been acutely conscious of the challenges faced by American minorities wishing to maintain a distinctive group existence, and she has also been alert to the great opportunities made possible by American voluntarism. In her historical research over the past four decades, she has analyzed the impact of Jewish leadership, the emergence of new types of agencies, and the role of ideology in forging unity in a highly disputatious American Jewish community. These have been her themes as she has examined the German-Jewish wave of immigration and its descendants and also the East European wave and its second generation. Even a cursory glance at the work of her students reveals just how profoundly her writings have shaped their historical outlook and preoccupations.

Jenna Weissman Joselit, who holds the Charles E. Smith Chair in Judaic Studies at George Washington University, studied with Naomi Cohen as an undergraduate at Barnard and subsequently as a graduate student at Columbia. She writes:

> It has been nearly thirty years since I first met Naomi Cohen and what struck me way back when—and continues to strike me now—was not just the arc of her scholarship, her command of the classroom and the precision of her prose but her way of being in the world: at once crisp, no nonsense and straightforward, warmhearted and caring, equally at home with books and people. I had never met anyone quite like her and I suspect I never will. What's more, at a time when female scholars were few and far between and the academy a somewhat chilly place for graduate students like me, Naomi Cohen brought an expansive, generous spirit to the entire enterprise. Leavening scholarship

with humanity, she gave her students the most wonderful of gifts: the capacity to find joy in and take pleasure from the discipline of history.

Cohen's many books and articles fall into five large areas: Jewish leaders, Jewish defense organizations, Zionism, antisemitism, and Jewish-Christian relations. (Full bibliographic information on her books and articles are given below.)

Her first publication, which drew on her Columbia dissertation, was a work on the public career of Oscar S. Straus, the first Jewish presidential cabinet secretary and, later, ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. Her interest in prominent laymen who took on the burden of American Jewish leadership has continued throughout her career. Thirty years later came her study of Jacob Schiff, banker, financier, and prominent community figure. Related to her interest in Jewish organizations is *Not Free to Desist*, her history of the American Jewish Committee from 1906 to 1966. (The title is from *Pirkei Avot* 2:16, "It is not up to you to finish the work; yet you are not free to desist from it"—a dictum that epitomizes her also.) Her now-standard *Encounter with Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States, 1830–1914* moves back in time and widens the historical panorama.

A longtime interest in church-state relations developed into *Jews in Christian America: The Pursuit of Religious Equality* as well as an edited volume titled *Essential Papers in Jewish-Christian Relations in the United States*. Many of the articles listed in the bibliography below, as well as in her books, speak to her research into antisemitism and Jewish responses to it. Investigations in the history of the Zionist movement were the subject of *American Jews and the Zionist Idea* and, thirteen years later, *The Year after the Riots: American Responses to the Palestine Crisis of 1929–1930*. In 2003 she gathered some of her studies, together with new pieces, in *The Americanization of Zionism, 1897–1948*. Yet another interest has been the history of the rabbinate in the United States. In 2008 she tapped the relatively neglected sermons of a wide range of rabbis, both traditionalists and reformers, when she published *What the Rabbis Said: The Public Discourse of Nineteenth-Century American Rabbis*.

As noted, Cohen contributed greatly to putting the communal history of American Jewry on a new level of sophistication. Much of her work concerns sober, flexible, ecumenically minded individuals respectful of Jewish learning, in love with American democracy, and dedicated to the survival of Judaism in the New World. By focusing on those who furthered Jewish adaptation to an unprecedented sociopolitical environment and by showing how they contributed to the furtherance of Jewish life in the American polity, Cohen played a major role in moving the study of this new branch of the Diaspora from an amateur preoccupation with ancestors and local gossip into a model for reconstructing the history of every American minority.

Born and raised in New York City, Naomi W. Cohen received her bachelor of arts degree from Hunter College of the CUNY, bachelor of Hebrew letters from the Seminary College of JTS, and master's and doctorate degrees from Columbia University. In 1948 she married the historian Gerson D. Cohen, who later became the chancellor of JTS. For thirty years she was a member of the history department of Hunter. She served on the faculty of the doctoral program in history at the Graduate Center of CUNY and held visiting professorships at Columbia and JTS. She now lives in Jerusalem, where she continues to do research and publish books and essays on wide-ranging subjects.

Among the many awards she received for professional achievement were those from the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Historical Society, the Cultural Achievement Award for Historical Studies of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, two National Jewish Book Awards, a presidential award for distinguished scholarship from Hunter College, and two honorary doctorates, including one from the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion.

At Hunter almost all of the courses Cohen taught were in general history, such as Twentieth-Century America, American Foreign Policy, U.S. Constitutional History, and Emigration and Ethnicity. Her signal contribution to the emergence of Jewish studies at Hunter was "HIST 357: American Jewish History." In the mid-sixties there was resistance to introducing such a supposedly parochial subject into the secular university catalogue. The breakthrough Cohen accomplished was a harbinger of what was soon to happen across the country: recognition of the value of this subject in the context of an emerging, more complex vision of the components of American culture. At Hunter, the CUNY Graduate Center, Columbia, and JTS, she trained students who went on to accomplish a whole range of historical activities. Those enrolled in her courses as well as students she tutored were expected to read primary sources, such as runs of periodicals, and to understand how each American Jewish communal structure, from colonial to recent times, contributed to a unique Jewish Diaspora in the making. Among her students were those who furthered Jewish studies in academe or in Jewish communal associations, exemplifying her inimitable mix of scholarly dedication and ability to inspire. Her rigorous methodological and pedagogical standards brought her student evaluations on the highest level and elicit testimony from those who can be considered her disciples.

One such disciple is Professor Bernadette McCauley, who now teaches "Immigration and Ethnicity," one of Cohen's curriculum innovations at Hunter. McCauley recalls that Cohen insisted that any serious undergraduate term paper required exploiting the resources of the New York Public Library:

> As a result, I learned to make myself fully at home there. Naomi's advice was always clear, firm, objective, authoritative—yet reassuring. Several years later and no longer officially her student, she generously read a chapter of my

> dissertation and suggested I drop a mass of details which had taken weeks to accumulate. The reader didn't need all that information, although I certainly did—sage advice I pass on to my students.

Roberta Newman, who went on to become an archivist and researcher for the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, writes that "the emphasis she [Cohen] placed on nuanced reading of primary source documents made a great impression on me. I have developed a deep love for pouring through crumbling papers in gray archival boxes. Professor Cohen was extraordinarily kind to me when I was her student, encouraging my interest in becoming a historian while gently correcting my many mistakes and oversights."

Charlotte Bonelli, director of American Jewish Committee Archives, remembers that "Naomi Cohen was the outstanding professor with whom I studied while working on my M.A. degree. A commanding presence in the classroom, her meticulous preparation, immense knowledge, challenging questions, quick wit, and wonderful sense of humor resulted in lively and engaging classes. We were in awe of her."

Jonathan D. Sarna, the Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History at Brandeis University, reports that "when he was a child the Cohens and the Sarnas often shared Passover seder and other occasions. She was highly respected in my parents' circle in the early 1960s for her success at being at once a faculty wife (and later the wife of the JTS chancellor), a dedicated mother, and a distinguished academic." Sarna never sat in her classroom but carefully studied Cohen's books and articles as a student at Brandeis and Yale. "Her work—always exhaustively researched and properly contextualized—served as a model for what scholarship in American Jewish history could be. She understood that to write American Jewish history required a thorough knowledge of both American and Jewish history." She generously agreed to read chapters-in-progress of what became his *American Judaism: A History*. "Naomi's careful comments on every chapter considerably improved my book," he recalled. "Her broad knowledge of the field, impeccable scholarly standards, and sensitive literary ear all helped my manuscript immeasurably. I shall always be grateful for this and for her superb contribution to the field."

Naomi C. Miller, a member of the Hunter College history department (for many years its chair), recalls that when Cohen was still a student at Hunter, academics questioned the legitimacy of Jewish history as a field of serious study:

> When she told her Hunter advisor that she intended to specialize in American Jewish history in her graduate work she was warned that the field was too limited and would not offer her opportunities for professional advancement. At Hunter she taught courses mainly in U.S. twentieth-century history but eventually was able to offer a very successful course in American Jewish history from the colonial period to the present.

In addition to her scholarship and teaching, Cohen made significant contributions to the development of the Hunter Jewish Social Studies Program, which coordinates an interdisciplinary major for undergraduates and sponsors public lectures. She was a savvy statesperson and *eminence grise*, ready to give hard-headed, fair-minded, shrewd advice. To colleagues whose dedication and intelligence she respected and to students who showed a love of learning and a willingness to work hard, she was patient, considerate, supportive, and helpful.

In retirement she has continued to show by example how to live a good life. Laura Schor, a member of the Hunter history department, former provost of Hunter, and founding dean of the Macaulay Honors College, writes:

> I met Naomi in her Jerusalem apartment several years ago and continue to visit with her there regularly. At the time I was working on a biography of Betty de Rothschild. I appreciated Naomi's effortless generosity; her recommendations of books to read and people to consult were always helpful. A visit with Naomi was a reminder of how to be a productive scholar throughout one's life. She has listened to many stories about my current research on Annie Landau and the Evelina de Rothschild School in Jerusalem. I look forward to continued opportunities to share ideas, test hypotheses, and benefit from her insightful suggestions for further inquiry.

I will add my own personal testimony. I have treasured her keen eye for detail and shrewd analysis. A draft of an essay shared with her came back with handwritten sheets of suggestions and polite notice of interpretive, factual, and even grammatical and spelling errors. I cherish her friendship, and it was a privilege to have been her colleague. I continue to be impressed by her ongoing contributions to scholarship. Since her retirement in Jerusalem, she has not paused in producing books and articles of great value, and I look forward to reading more of her insightful and finely crafted works of history.

Robert M. Seltzer, written with the help of Naomi Miller, Bernadette McCauley, and Laura Schor.

Writings of Naomi W. Cohen

Compiled by Brian Smollett

Books/Monographs

A Dual Heritage: The Public Career of Oscar S. Straus. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969. Also "Oscar S. Straus," *Biographical Dictionary of Internationalists*, 697–699. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1983. "Oscar S. Straus." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 15, 430–432. New York: Macmillan, 1972.

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Packer Collegiate, c. 1850s
(Courtesy Brooklyn College Library Archives)

The Education of Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic Children In Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York City[1]

Stephan F. Brumberg

New York City grew from just over 60,000 in 1800 to more than 200,000 in 1830, surpassing Philadelphia as the largest city in the United States. In the next thirty years its population more than quadrupled to nearly 814,000. The rush of people and sheer physical transformation of the city was tremendous. Changes were even more dramatic in its sister city, Brooklyn, which saw its 1830 population explode from just over 15,000, living in a collection of small towns and villages, to a city of nearly 267,000 by 1860.[2] The numbers are a crude indicator of the explosive economic growth of the region, enabling it to absorb such a great increase in population. But this growth also reflects enormous immigration into New York and Brooklyn, altering the very composition of the region. The established New Yorkers of English, Scots, and Dutch ancestry (along with freed African Americans and an admixture of many other nationalities) were joined by an ever-growing number of Irish and German immigrants. The social order was irrevocably altered, the religious mix of the city reconfigured, and the languages of the streets changed.

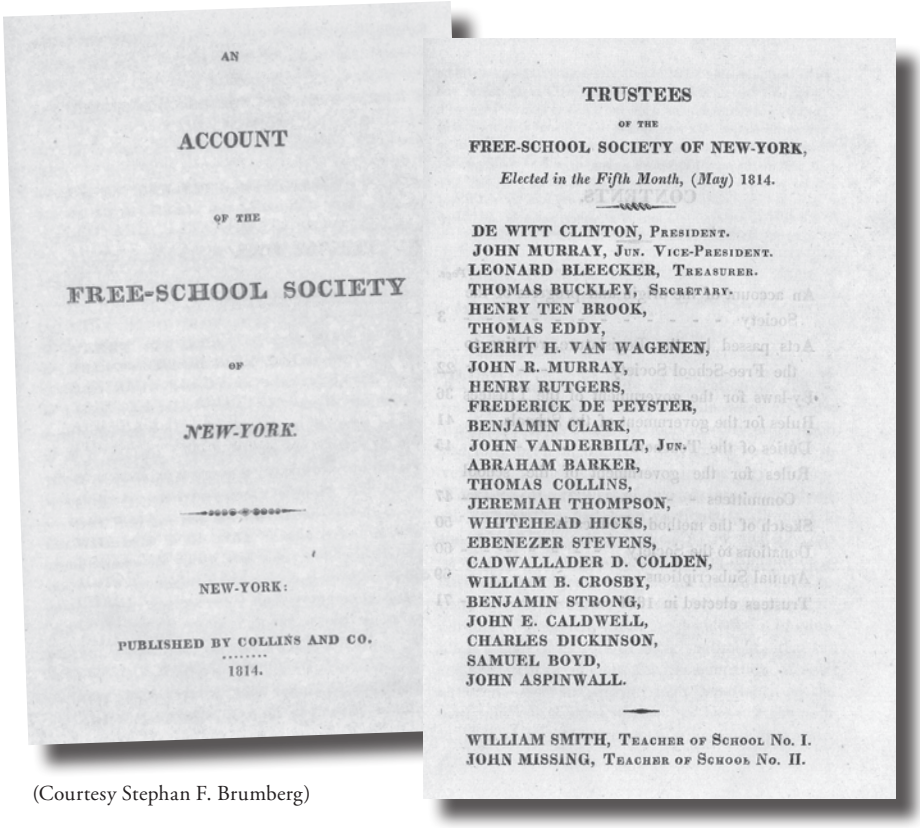
The city's Catholic population, primarily Irish and German,[3] approached nearly half of the city's population by 1860. German Jewish immigrants began to arrive in the Port of New York in substantial numbers in the 1830s.[4] The small Jewish community of 1,150 in 1830[5] grew to 7,000 in 1840, 16,000 in 1850, and 40,000 by 1860, nearly five percent of New York's population.[6]

The established population of New York was challenged by the vast numbers of newcomers, perceived as different in culture, values, allegiances, and faith. They feared that their way of life, their political dominance, and their culture would be lost under the ceaseless waves of strangers. For New York's Protestants, especially the committed evangelical denominations, there was the added fear that Roman Catholicism would conquer the city by the sheer force of its numbers, making New York an outpost of a foreign potentate, the pope in Rome. There was great concern for the education of the children of newcomers: Can they be made into upstanding New Yorkers? Leaders of the established order claimed the right to educate the children of newcomers so that the arriving communities would not culturally replicate themselves and so that their children could be transformed into Americans. Robert C. Cornell, president of the Public School Society (PSS), argued in 1840 that the Society did not lack

> sympathy for the oppressed of other lands, who seek asylum in this; on the contrary, they act under a firm conviction that the sooner such persons abandon any unfavorable prejudices with which they may arrive among us, and become familiar with our language, and reconciled to our institutions and habits, the better it will be for them, and for the country of their adoption. If this be true, the best interests of all will be alike promoted by having their children mingle with ours in the public seminaries of learning.[7]

To what extent were Cornell's goals realized in American common (i.e., public) schools, and to what extent did newcomers create educational paths of their own to realize their own educational goals? We will examine the education received by the children of New Yorkers, especially its newcomers, with a focus on the children of Jews. To understand the Jewish experience, however, we must contrast it with the major immigrant community of the time, the Catholics.

In the 1840s and early 1850s, most Jewish children were enrolled in Jewish day schools and received religious and secular instruction in Hebrew and English subjects. By the end of the 1850s, all synagogue-sponsored day schools had closed, and most Jewish students were enrolled in the city's public schools, where they received the same instruction as their Christian classmates.



AN

ACCOUNT

OF THE

FREE-SCHOOL SOCIETY

OF

NEW-YORK.

NEW-YORK:

PUBLISHED BY COLLINS AND CO.

1814.

TRUSTEES

OF THE

FREE-SCHOOL SOCIETY OF NEW-YORK,

Elected in the Fifth Month, (May) 1814.

DE WITT CLINTON, President.
JOHN MURRAY, Jun. Vice-President.
LEONARD BLEECKER, Treasurer.
THOMAS BUCKLEY, Secretary.
HENRY TEN BROOK,
THOMAS EDDY,
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BENJAMIN CLARK,
JOHN VANDERBILT, Jun.
ABRAHAM BARKER,
THOMAS COLLINS,
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WILLIAM B. CROSBY,
BENJAMIN STRONG,
JOHN E. CALDWELL,
CHARLES DICKINSON,
SAMUEL BOYD,
JOHN ASPINWALL.

WILLIAM SMITH, Teacher of School No. I.
JOHN MISSING, Teacher of School No. II.

(Courtesy Stephan F. Brumberg)

Whatever religious instruction they received was offered in supplementary evening or weekend schools.

By contrast, the Catholic church formally rejected the public schools and set out to create a parallel Catholic system for its children, although a significant number of Catholic children continued to attend the city's public schools. How and why did different faith communities react differently to the changing education sector of New York City?

The Public School Society

The Public School Society (PSS), which began as a charitable venture in 1805, opened its first school in 1806 for the children of impoverished whites who were not members of a religious society. The PSS changed over the decades and came to resemble a public board of education, providing free primary education to the city's children, regardless of church membership or denomination.[8] But it was not a publicly controlled system of schooling, since it was run by a private, self-perpetuating board of trustees. It acted in the public interest, as that interest was interpreted by a self-defined group of citizen-philanthropists—all male, most Protestants, and all members of the city's economic and social elite. It could be, and was, attacked as serving a particular interest and not reflecting the public will. For the board members' part, they believed they acted out of benevolence to the children of the poor and of service to the public good:

> Destitute of all moral and mental culture, [the children of the poor] were wandering about the streets, exposed to the influence of corrupt example, and at a time of life, when the impressions which are made, generally fix the features of the future character. From the want of a virtuous education, they were more liable to become the victims of those evils, by which public hospitals and alms-houses are often filled with objects of disease and poverty, and society burdened with taxes for their support.[9]

In 1840, seven Catholic schools petitioned the New York City Common Council for a share of the state common school funds. The Scotch Presbyterian Church, along with the Jewish congregations Shearith Israel (on Crosby Street) and Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, joined in the petition for a portion of school monies for "schools attached to said Churches or Congregations."[10] In formal opposition were the commissioners of school money, the PSS, and "other (unnamed) societies and individuals," primarily Protestant.[11]

The Catholic campaign for public support of its free schools, directed by Bishop John Hughes, was rejected by the New York City Common Council in 1840 and by the New York State Legislature in 1841 and 1842. However, the state legislature did pass a law in 1842, effectively reaffirming an earlier 1824 decision to ban the use of public funds for sectarian schooling. It directed New York City to establish its own board of education, paralleling the system throughout the state. It also established ward boards of education composed of

elected officials to open and run the schools. Several years later, the city board of education absorbed the schools of the PSS. This monumental "school war" left the nominally secular public schools in control of most education in New York City and the "defeated" Catholic petitioners fully committed to establishing a school system of their own.[12] Where did the Jews fit in?

At the founding of the New York City public schools in 1842, the city contained three religious groups, of unequal size and power, each with different orientations to Bible reading in the public schools and to religious instruction in general. As William Huchison observed, "[W]hereas diversity [defined as a fact or condition] happened to American religion in the first half of the nineteenth century, pluralism [an ideal or impulse] of the kind people now discuss did not arrive until the second half of the twentieth."[13]

Established New Yorkers, overwhelmingly Protestant, were not prepared to concede either their control of the city or their cultural heritage. There were elements of tolerance in the community but little openness to a pluralism that involved full participation by various religious confessions in the ongoing rule and life of the community. The public schools were perceived as liberal efforts to include all groups, but that inclusion required accepting the Protestant definitions of "public" school and the role of religion in those schools. The Catholic hierarchy, for its part, wanted to sustain its separation—religiously and to a considerable degree culturally—hence it was neither attracted to the "public" schools nor willing to accept the proffered conditions for entry. For the Protestant leaders of the city, the Catholic demands were perceived as threats not only to the nonsectarian nature of the public schools but to the separation of religious establishments and the state—at least as this had been worked out over the prior half-century.

Jews, anxious to gain inclusion into the political, economic, and civil life of the city, came to see the public schools as a means to such ends for their children. Hence they were willing to make concessions and tolerate the nonsectarian Protestant religious practices of the public schools. And in any event, as a relatively small community at that time, they were not in a position to make nonnegotiable demands.

For Bishop Hughes, Protestantism was a heresy, no better than deism or "indifferentism," and not on an equal footing with the Roman Catholic Church.[14] He was interested in teaching Catholic children the Truths of the Church, not religious relativism—yet another reason for avoiding the public schools. As he wrote in 1852 to Archbishop Blanc, recollecting the school war of 1840–1842 and the public schools established in its wake,

> This *dragon* of education is, in my mind, devouring the hope of the Country as well as of religion. As at present it is *socialism*, Red republicanism, universalism, infidelity, deism, atheism, pantheism—any thing, every thing, except religionism & patriotism.[15]

It is important to note that Hughes was by no means alone in proposing a system of denominational free schools, supported by public funds, both as a means of resolving religious controversies and allowing the full expression of freedom of conscience and of religious practice. In 1841 the educational committee of the Episcopal Church, at its general convention, recommended a system of diocesan schools. Sectarian religion was seen as indispensable to the proper education of the child, combining the development of his or her moral nature along with the intellectual. Such instruction could only be provided under church auspices.[16]

The Presbyterians, in their general assembly of 1847, voted in favor of a parochial school to be attached to each of their churches. In their view the public schools had repudiated "all connexion [*sic*] with the Church" and had woefully neglected moral education. The mind was addressed but not the heart: "The Chinese custom of bandaging the feet is not a more effectual encroachment on the perfection of the physical system than our political custom of dwarfing the heart is a dishonour to the moral system."[17]

In the 1840s and 1850s, the Jews of New York also set about to create schools attached to their congregations. Many New Yorkers, as well as many other Americans, supported publicly funded denominational schooling, but it was not to happen. The rejection of denominational schooling was due, in part, to the economics of schooling and the inability of most denominations to support systems of education. The proscriptions against public support of denominational schooling found in the laws of many states—not just New York—denied denominational schools the financial support they needed. There was also a reading of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would proscribe state support of religion, a position comfortable to many Americans. But as Timothy Smith has argued, the widespread leadership of Protestant clergy and lay leaders in the establishment, formation, and governance of public schools "stamped upon neighborhoods, states, and nation an interdenominational Protestant ideology which nurtured dreams of personal and social progress. By the middle of the nineteenth century, leading citizens assumed that Americanism and Protestantism were synonyms and that education and Protestantism were allies."[18]

The lack of public funds, it must be noted, did not deter Catholics from creating parochial schools run by the church—the second largest school system in the nation. Nor did it deter the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church from creating its schools, nor, in our day, did it hinder the development of Jewish day schools and schools run by many religious denominations. But the system of free public schools, open to children of all religious backgrounds (or no religious affiliation at all), and supposedly divorced from any religion or denomination, became, and still is, the dominant educational force in America.

Protestants and Politicians

The motley group of petitioners in 1840 had not argued against religious instruction or practice as such, but for denominational schooling—a share in the public funds to support sectarian schools for their own children. Every religious sect, they argued, should share in the school funds to offer free primary schooling that encompassed religious as well as secular instruction.

The New York City Common Council Committee on School Money rejected the proposal of making funds available to all religious denominations as a means of ensuring equity in the disbursement of school funds. Committee members argued that any religious instruction, supported by public funds, was contrary to the settled American principle of religious disestablishment.[19] In rejecting the arguments of the petitioners, the committee cited New York State law prohibiting the distribution of school funds to schools that engaged in sectarian instruction.

> The Legislature intended the Public School Fund to be employed for the purpose of communicating to the children of the state, instruction of a strictly secular character, altogether unconnected with either political or religious education.[20]

There were also fears, expressed by the PSS, that if funds were distributed to every denomination, there would not be adequate funds for "public schools." Additionally, there were concerns that such a system would foment clashes between and among sects, and

> bigotry, fanaticism and violence might assume the place of charity, meekness and love.… The history of the world teems with examples of religious excitement, degenerating into wild and embittered fanaticism; jealousies converted into open dissensions, and dissensions ripening into wars, and those wars devastating whole nations, until the angry feelings of the partizans [*sic*] were satiated by the blood of their victims.[21]

The committee expressed the growing consensus that public schools should confine themselves to secular studies and "moral education," while Sunday schools would provide basic religious instruction. "Without Sunday schools," as Ann Boylan has argued, "'the common school deal' (with all its racial and religious blind spots) would never have worked. Sunday schools enabled Americans to reject denominational schooling and class-oriented public education in favor of the ideal—if not the reality—of free public schooling for all."[22]

It is apparent that the committee wanted to steer clear of religious strife and hoped that the unwritten public school–Sunday school compromise would hold in New York. Inter-denominational hostility was a real and present danger, especially between Protestants and Catholics. The committee members were clearly sensitive to potential fault lines that multiplied and deepened as the city's

population grew and became more variegated.[23] The vivid language and extreme scenarios of the committee's report suggest that the last thing members wanted to do was to exacerbate divisions and encourage sectarianism. They naively believed that a religiously neutral, nonsectarian, secular education would be acceptable to most New Yorkers. Hence their conclusion that

> No desire exists to include one sect in the benefits of the School Fund, and exclude others, but the object of the Committee, has been to keep that fund sacredly appropriated to the purposes for which it was created—the purposes of free and common secular education.[24]

The committee's arguments were consistent with those set out in the First Amendment and in the writings of Jefferson and Madison.[25] They saw a clear distinction between the role of the church and of the state, and they sought to maintain that separation.

The decision also ensured a continued separate educational life for many of New York City's Catholic children. As historian Diane Ravitch concluded in her study of this period, the Catholic clergy believed that

> the religious liberty of Catholic school children could be protected only in a school where the Catholic religion was taught. A school which attempted to teach all creeds or no creed at all was repugnant to them. Devout Catholics did not want their children exposed to other religions, nor did they want their children educated in a school which put error and truth on an equal footing.[26]

The Jewish Petition to the New Board of Education

The Jewish reaction to the rejected petition was more subdued. Jews joined in the petition initiated by the Catholics so that they could share in state funds if the decision were favorable. In 1840, however, they had less at stake. They were still a very small community with perhaps one school; it is not clear if the Polonies Talmud Torah, run by Shearith Israel, was actually in operation as a day school at that time.

The Jews, however, retained interest in public education. As soon as the new board of education was constituted in 1843, they pressed their claims for just treatment and against practices and instructional materials they perceived as anti-Jewish. The trustees of the Fourth Ward, a heavily immigrant neighborhood located just to the east and north of city hall, communicated the Jews' concerns to the board of education. The Jews complained of passages in certain textbooks being used in the ward schools that were anti-Jewish or that explicitly promoted the Christian religion.[27]

The select committee of the board of education that was formed to review the complaints took the position that the law creating the public schools did

not "prohibit the teaching, inculcating or practicing religious doctrines or tenets in our Schools" but only prohibited "religious *sectarian* doctrine."[28] Since Christianity was not a sect, interdenominational Christianity could legitimately be taught and practiced in the public schools as long as the schools avoided sectarian creeds and doctrines. The select committee did not follow the precedent of the 1840 Common Council Committee on School Money, which maintained clear separation of religion and public schooling; nor did it appear to have been influenced by the writings of Madison and Jefferson.

Initially questioning why it was only Jews from the Fourth Ward who complained (overlooking that this ward was the center of the Jewish population in the city, especially of recently immigrated Jews), the committee followed with a back-handed compliment: "It is a well known fact (which is highly creditable to the members of the Jewish persuasion) that they are very little prone to interfere with the institutions of the country."[29] Most of the textbook passages that the Jews found offensive were in *American Popular Lessons* by Eliza Robbins, originally published in 1820 and revised and reprinted frequently.[30] The PSS had long employed the book, which "was used in its original [1820] form for nine years, chiefly in the Public Schools of the city of New York"[31] and by the New York City Board of Education. In it we find the following: "A man asked Jesus Christ what he should do to be good, and to be happy. Jesus Christ told the man, he must love God; and that he must love his neighbor as himself."[32] Aside from the christological reference, this moral lesson can be found in Jewish as well as Christian writings. But we also find:

> There was a city in Asia, called Jerusalem; it was the largest city of the people called Jews. Jesus Christ was killed by the Jews at Jerusalem.[33]

> Jesus Christ was the Son of God. He says of himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life.… I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."[34]

The Jews of the Fourth Ward objected to many passages in this and other textbooks. All were in a similar vein, and Jews across the city would have viewed them as either offensive or inappropriate. They also objected to the reading of the New Testament.

The select committee could find no grounds for objections to the cited passages, "even by the Jews except what may arise from the fact that they are chiefly derived from the New Testament, and inculcate the general principles of Christianity."[35] After all, the committee asserted, they express beautiful and noble sentiments. They rejected as without merit any complaints of the material's Christian nature. We need to examine their argument closely because it frames subsequent arguments regarding religion in the schools. The select committee rejected out of hand the position of the trustees of the Fourth Ward who

> say that they do not see any good reason why the religious opinions of the Jew should not be regarded with the same favor as those of Christians—and they therefore call on this Board to exclude from our Common Schools all books which inculcate the principles of the Christian religion, or else to deprive such Schools of all participation in the public money.
>
> Your Committee cannot but view this as a most extraordinary and untenable position on the part of the said Trustees; and the principles assumed by them, if carried out, would justify the Mohametans, the Chinese or Pagans, on their coming among us, to object to our whole system of public instruction, because it interfered with their monstrous, absurd and unintelligible dogmas and superstitions.
>
> Even the Jews have not, and from the very nature of our systems, cannot have the same privileges as those who embrace the Christian religion.… We have indeed secured to all the full enjoyment of their religious belief and mode of worship; but in offering civil and religious liberty to the oppressed of other nations, it surely was not intended to give them the right of changing or interfering with our own religious institutions.[36]

Tolerance yes, but full participation was not yet acceptable. With Jewish objections summarily dispatched, the committee turned next to the Universalists, who objected to some of the same passages as the Jews, especially those regarding the doctrine of future judgment and future rewards and punishments. The committee, however, argued that the principle of future reward and punishment by a supreme being is central to the United States system of justice. We swear to tell the truth, in the full knowledge of this principle. The law, they claim, "recognizes the principle of future punishments; it is a most salutary principle, and very generally admitted among civilized nations as the great bond of safety in the administration of civil justice" and should be impressed upon children at every occasion.[37]

The final claim the committee rejected relates to reading from the Protestant Bible. The Catholics strenuously objected and were joined by the Jews, albeit for quite different reasons. The committee argued that the legislation creating the board in 1842 "did not intend to exclude the Holy Scriptures from our common schools, nor to prohibit the inculcation of the great and fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion."[38] They argued that Christianity and the use of the Protestant Bible is enshrined in national and state statutes and practices: Sabbath day laws, swearing oaths of office or to give testimony in court, laws requiring that masters give Bibles to apprentices and the state to convicts, and so on. The state, they argued, would hardly have intended to deprive schoolchildren of the Bible.

Following the logic of the committee's argument, if the Bible were to be eliminated from the schools, it implied that God was ejected from the school-

house. It could also be seen as a denial of American history, made comprehensible only in terms of biblical typological narratives.[39] And finally, as the above objections to schoolbooks demonstrated, biblical selections were a mainstay of school readers and spellers, which served the dual purposes of literacy instruction and moral education. Without moral instruction, a principal reason for schooling would be lost.

The presumptions and prejudices of the select committee reflected the rise of evangelical Protestantism and the believed fusion of Protestantism and American civilization.[40] The report can be viewed against the backdrop of evangelical Protestant activism directed at significant religious challenges, especially the growing Catholic presence, and the perceived rise in immorality in America's rapidly growing cities. As Naomi Cohen has written,

> The new climate of opinion, spawned by the second Great Awakening, was… a rude awakening for American Jews. On several levels they found themselves out of step. Just as soon as they had fully appropriated the Jeffersonian teachings on religious freedom, those same Enlightenment principles were being brushed aside or repudiated by religious activists. While Jews remained frozen in an eighteenth-century philosophy that questioned the legitimacy of a religious state, America moved on to a nineteenth-century romantic mood that held Christianity to be the progenitor of individual rights and social values.[41]

But if the tenor of the times impelled the polity to accept the Protestant basis of American society as well as the biblical base of moral instruction, which version of the Bible should be read? It had to be a Protestant version, preferably the King James, since the Catholic Douay Bible "is accompanied with numerous comments and notes illustrating and enforcing the peculiar doctrines and tenets of the Roman Catholic Church, and is so far at least decidedly sectarian in its character, and clearly within the prohibitory clause of the act [creating the education board]."[42]

The committee could not envision schools without the Bible. They asked how one could teach the origin of the world—astronomy, geology, and human origins—"without a resort to the revealed world of God," which, they believed, underlay all instruction.[43] The committee concluded by rejecting all complaints forwarded by the trustees of the Fourth Ward and said that "the Bible [without note or comment] should be retained in our common schools."[44]

Before the rise of public schools in the 1820s and 1830s, nearly all American schools were private, and many were church-related. With the rise of public schools, churches, in their institutional forms, were separated from public education. But the schools remained linked to religion through the Bible. For most Americans, religion could not be divorced from life, nor from a child's education. And for believers, the Bible was the proof text for moral instruction,

the foundation on which to build the lives of the rising generation. To sever the schools from the Bible, the very "word of God," was to eject God from the schools, condemn many children to lives of immorality, and sentence society to potential chaos.

The school system reflected in the select committee report was neither welcoming to Jews nor Catholics. You may enter our schools, it said, but on our terms. This is a Christian (read Protestant) land, and our ways ought to become your ways.

Decentralizing School Decision-Making

The board of education, in the following year, sent signals that it had backed off this confrontational approach to religious diversity. The "Report of the Committee on the Annual Apportionment, on the communications of the County Superintendent, relative to the use of THE BIBLE in the Public Schools of the City of New York" was triggered by an overzealous superintendent of schools who tried to enforce compulsory Bible reading in all the ward schools. This committee argued that the central board of education had no authority to require such readings, nor to select books for ward schools. These were the clear legal prerogatives of the ward trustees, who "are at liberty to pursue such a course [reading or not reading the Bible] as their own sense of duty and the peculiar circumstances of their schools may dictate to them, as most expedient."[45]

The commissioners of the board of education wanted to gather in all children of "poverty and destitution" by practicing tolerance and respect for the wishes of residents in each ward. They feared that "one false step" might drive these children from the schools, where they would be "left to grow up in hopeless ignorance."[46]

The committee concluded that only eleven ward schools had omitted Bible readings.

> When we consider that these schools are made up almost wholly of the children of Catholic parents, who have hitherto been unwilling to send their children to any public school, that they were heretofore confined wholly to the scanty provisions which were made for instruction by the Catholic Church, that the schools in which they are now gathered are prohibited by law from teaching, inculcating, or practicing any of the peculiar tenets of their Church; and that Bible lessons and Scripture histories are among their class books, the Committee thinks there is much reason for congratulation in the progress which has already been made.[47]

A local option, determined by ward trustees, would serve to mollify local constituents. But once in our schools, they implied, we can still shape their sensibilities, even if every outward form is not observed. This was the very covert practice that Hughes found so objectionable—insinuating the Protestant school between the Catholic child, his or her parents, and their church.[48]

Bible Reading in the Schools

The pressure to make Bible reading compulsory continued unabated throughout the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s. The established Protestant churches, especially evangelical denominations, saw the suspension of mandatory Bible reading as a sign of the public school's godlessness, which reinforced their fears that the city would be overrun by illiterate, immoral, and un-Christian immigrants. The need to transform immigrant children into right thinking and believing Americans is captured in a report from a New York Sunday School Union school in 1848:

> Our school is composed of immigrant German children, some of whom have been in this country only a few months. Our room is full. Multitudes of Germans might be gathered into S. [*sic*] schools in this section of the city, with *very little* effort, if rooms and teachers could be procured. What else but the S. school can *Americanize* the thousands of German children in our city, and fit them to become citizens of the republic, and finally of the heavenly Jerusalem?[49]

This is a very early use of the term "Americanize." It is important to note that transformation was as much religious as sociocultural and that the Sunday school rather than the public school was the proper place to realize such changes. One is reborn with a new faith, homeland, and language.

The religious element is crucial to the crusade against immigrants because many religious conservatives believed that immigrants brought with them not just foreign ways but immorality and crime. New York City, they claimed, was a growing cesspool of evil and vice in proportion to the growth of its immigrant population. They feared that the city nurtured Satan and his followers, and only religious truth and morality could confront the devil:

> The population of our city is rapidly increasing; it is also fluctuating and heterogeneous in its character. The great gateway of the Western World, around it gather the men of all climes, of almost every kingdom, people and nation under the whole heaven. Multitudes linger with us. Adventurers of every hue, of all creeds, and of no creed, paupers with minds as degraded as their bodies are brutalized, felons fleeing from justice—such are some of the elements constantly infused into our social system. And these evils of our position are as yet, we have much reason to fear, but in the infancy of their development. But besides this constant infusion of foreign depravity, we are continually imbibing the infection of vice from our interior towns. Reckless and vicious adventurers every where find their most natural prey in the population of large cities. So long, then, as Satan remains unchained, may we look for monsters of evil in our midst, who care neither for age, nor sex, so that they may gloat over their victims. Need we then wonder at the desecration of the Lord's day amongst us, and at the wayward, untractable character of too many of our youth?[50]

To the Protestant religious establishment, the schools could not be neutral. If the public schools did not provide proper religious instruction and did not shape the moral character of its students according to Bible truth, then they became party to the evil and a breeder of vice and crime.

The board of education remained trapped between the Protestant religious forces wishing to enlist the public schools in their crusade against the devil and to instill simple gospel truths[51] in the students, and the board's desire to enroll all children of the city in the public schools to raise the level of literacy and shape future American citizens. The board of education's commissioners, as elected officials, tended to be more "liberal" regarding the religious orientation of schools. Commissioners—especially those from districts with large numbers of immigrant Catholics and Jews—tended to support "local option" and downplay formal religious instruction and practices. This position is best exemplified by Erastus C. Benedict, Esq., board president in the early 1850s. He argued that

> The basis of our system is not that all sects should alike be patronized by the government, but that the government has nothing to do with any of them.… [Religion] cannot be compelled… and it is quite plain that there can be no Common Schools if sectarian peculiarities are to be taught in them, or if the different sects are to be allowed to apply the school moneys to sectarian purposes.[52]

Not only should sectarian instruction be banned, but all religious instruction should be eliminated. For Benedict, there ought to be a clear functional separation of religion and public education;[53] he believed that secular studies could be safely pursued without religious instruction.[54] "No one would think that the musical gamut or the five positions of the dancing school should be mixed up with religious instructions, nor that the teaching of the mechanics' shop and the factory… be alternative with catechism and creeds."[55] Each has its proper place, he said, and religion need not fear the secular studies followed in public schools:

> It is a transparent fallacy that there is anything in learning—no matter how rudimental or how profound—that is inconsistent with religion.… Who can believe, in this age of the world, that it is necessary to exorcise the multiplication table—to cast out devils from orthography, etymology, syntax, and prosody, and to protect the youthful mind against heresies and infidelity that lurk in penmanship and arithmetic?[56]

Benedict's clear separation of church and school was not echoed by the influential city superintendent of schools, Samuel S. Randall, who served in that post from 1854 to 1870. Randall came to New York City from Albany, where he had been New York State deputy superintendent of common schools.[57] In his inaugural annual report he proclaimed:

> Upon the broad foundations… of an assured conviction of the immortality of our existence as sentient and intelligent beings, and of the truth of that Christian Revelation which has shed its clear and benignant light upon our path, must we construct the work of education.[58]

The place of religion in the public schools was by no means a settled issue. Interestingly, the Samuel Randall who led the battle to make Bible reading compulsory in all public schools, *with no exceptions*, was the brother of Henry Randall, who, as state superintendent of common schools, had ruled in 1853 that a Catholic child could not be compelled to read the Protestant Bible. However, Henry Randall ruled, teachers could lead Bible reading (without note or comment), hymns, and prayers before school hours, with children attending voluntarily.[59]

In the mid-1850s, the politics of the period in New York City favored tolerance and local option. The laws governing public education in the city were modified in 1853 by the New York State Legislature.[60] While the law—known as the "consolidated law"— permits Bible reading, it was not required. But if read, it could not be accompanied by note or comment, hence excluding the Catholic Douay Bible. Yet another clause prevented the central board of education from selecting which version of the Bible, *if any,* should be used. It prohibited sectarian teachings and barred books that were "prejudicial to the particular doctrines or tenets of any particular Christian *or other religious sect* [italics mine]." This responded directly to Catholic and Jewish criticism of schoolbooks that were anathema to their beliefs and practices. The paragraph didn't speak directly to the issue of school prayer, although the clause protecting "the rights of conscience" obliquely addressed compulsory prayer. It didn't prohibit the recitation of "The Lord's Prayer," for example, but it seemed to have made it voluntary.

To enforce this aspect of the school law, the consolidated law made it incumbent upon all school officers in every ward to "examine, ascertain, and report to the Board of Education… whether the provisions of this Act in relation to the teaching of sectarian doctrines, or the use of sectarian books shall have been violated."[61] The city superintendent was also to visit schools to see that sectarian doctrines and books were not being used and to report back to the board of education if he found any violations.[62]

The Free Academy, which the board of education had established in 1847 and which would be renamed The City College of New York in 1866, was also affected by the consolidated law. The section of the law titled "Regarding the Free Academy" stipulated that applicants are required to "*have attended the Common Schools for twelve months*."[63] This entry requirement elevated the academic status of the common schools and made them relatively more attractive to those—especially in the immigrant community—who were aspiring to a free higher education.

The 1853 revisions of school law made the ward schools reasonably acceptable to Jews. They now had the law on their side in efforts to root out schoolbooks they found offensive. The compromise on Bible reading could work if they lived in wards with concentrations of Jewish residents, as the trustees could be expected to be sympathetic to potential voters. Either public Bible reading could be suspended, or readings could be drawn from the Old Testament, without note or comment, a position comfortable to Jews.[64] The choice of which version of the Bible to use was not critical for Jews since the American Jewish community had yet to produce an American English translation of the Old Testament. And the constitutional right, cited in the revised laws, to freedom of conscience could be exercised to prevent compulsory prayer for Jewish children, while still leaving the door open for Christian prayers and hymns for others.

The law did not work for Catholics, however. It still outlawed their English version of the Bible, since it included notes and commentary, and it denied school funds to any school that gave sectarian instruction. As Dr. John Power, a priest in the New York Diocese, had written, readings from the King James translation of the Bible, without note or comments, were unacceptable:[65]

> The Catholic Church tells her children that they must be taught their religion by AUTHORITY. The Sects say, read the bible, judge for yourselves. The bible is read in the public schools, the children are allowed to judge for themselves. The Protestant principle is therefore acted upon, slyly inculcated, and the schools are Sectarian.[66]

Nothing short of public funding of religious schools, complete with the freedom to incorporate particular religious beliefs and practices into the ongoing instructional program, could meet Catholic requirements. Catholics backed public support for all denominational schools but could not support religiously neutral or secular public schools. Bishop Hughes and his supporters believed that inculcating and protecting the faith of his followers demanded Catholic education run by the Catholic church and staffed by Catholic teachers, preferably drawn from religious orders. Public schools were defined as Protestant (and heretical) and, hence, inappropriate for Catholic children.[67] This was the position Bishop Kenrick came to embrace in Philadelphia, and it was later adopted by the entire American Roman Catholic Church.[68] Catholic schools were necessary not only to impart truth and educate children of the church but as a vital element to preserve, reinforce, and transmit to the new generation belief in, and loyalty to, the authority of the church, to the orthodoxy of its religious teachings, and to the legitimacy of its hierarchy.

The new school law of 1853 was not always acceptable to New York's Protestants. The wealthier Protestants still sent their children to private schools and academies, many affiliated with established churches. But most New Yorkers gravitated to the public schools. Between 1829 and 1850, the public school share

of total enrollments increased from 38 percent to 82 percent, including not only the poorer classes, but the middle classes, as well.[69] Evangelical church leaders increasingly attacked the public schools as ungodly, especially because they tolerated removal of the Bible from the schoolroom (a charge not true for most classrooms, but true enough in many immigrant wards that enrolled the very children felt to be most in need of gospel learning). In 1857, board President Andrew H. Green was forced to respond to such attacks:

> The charge… that the Public Schools are sources of infidelity, vice and crime, is so extraordinary, that the Board are unwilling to believe that it has been made, in seriousness and sincerity, by any person whose opinions on the subject are worthy of any respect.[70]

Citing City Superintendent S. Randall's report, he assured the public that Christian morality was taught by precept and practice. Green argued that many other sources for the crime and vice in the community were responsible without searching out the public schools to blame. In fact, the moral instruction the schools offered buttressed the morals of the community then under attack. His contemporary social critique resonates in the present:

> The principles of trade, as more recently taught, by which it is given up to free selfishness and competition; the doctrine practically set up, that national wealth is the highest national good; the tactics of political parties, so full of temptations to evil; the wonderful activity with which crimes, and even the rumors and suspicions of crimes, are sought for and gathered up, painted in vivid and romantic colors, and spread before the whole people, every day, in the columns of our able and interesting newspapers, so cheap that beggars can buy, and so appetizing as to tempt the dullest palates, and sure to chronicle the ultimate and easy escape of ten times as many suspected and accused as the punished or the convicted, even—these are causes more than enough, unrestrained, to account for all the vice and crime among us.[71]

City Superintendent Randall also took up defense of the schools, albeit without Green's cynicism. He assured the critics that God had not been expelled and that the public schools embraced Christian virtue.

> In all our Public Schools and departments, with a very few and inconsiderable exceptions, the services of each day are commenced by the reading of selections from the Bible, by the Principal or some one of the School Officers, followed by the solemn and reverent repetition of the Lord's Prayer by all the pupils and teachers in concert, and by the singing of one or more appropriate hymns of Christian thanksgiving and praise.[72]

Regardless of the argument's rationale or the eloquence of its presentation, the religious critics could not and did not accept a public school system that

Erasmus Hall, 1850
(Courtesy Brooklyn College Library Archives)

made Bible reading voluntary. For the religious forces, the Bible symbolized the presence of God. God's presence was not "voluntary," to be decided by a political consensus of infidels. It was The Truth. The battle to ensure God's sovereignty could not be broken off.

The board of education, therefore, was caught between the hard place of politics and the rock of religion. It had to serve all communities to spread the benefits of education, upon which a free, democratic society depended; but it could not antagonize the Protestant religious establishment, which was well connected with the social, political, and economic elites of the city, upon whom the board depended for its resources.

Jewish Education in New York City in the 1840s and 1850s

The growing community of German and English Jews in New York City in the 1840s had few alternatives for educating their children. The schools of the Public School Society, and, after 1842, the board of education, were perceived as Protestant and unwelcoming to Jews. In addition, the PSS schools were primarily run on the Lancasterian model: one teacher to hundreds of students, with most actual instruction provided by student "monitors."[73] Such pauper-tainted schools were off-putting to parents with even very modest means, who preferred fee-paying "private schools" with far smaller classes.

Public schools used objectionable schoolbooks, and Jewish parents found the Christian religious practices problematic as well. But most private schooling was church-affiliated and inappropriate for Jewish students, as well. Starting in 1842, New York City synagogues began to establish day schools.[74] By the mid-1850s seven schools had enrolled more than 850 students and employed thirty-five teachers (a student-to-teacher ratio of about 24:1). These numbers can be compared with the substantially larger Catholic community, which

operated seventeen parochial schools, and Protestant denominations, which ran six. The twenty-three Christian schools, which enrolled several thousand students, employed seventy teachers.[75]

Unfortunately, the histories of the Jewish schools were not adequately recorded, nor were their records archived. However, the partial records of two of seven schools established between 1842 and 1857 have survived: the Hebrew National School of Congregation Shaarey Zedek and the B'nai Jeshurun Educational Institute.[76] We can get a sense of the day schools from the "minute book" of the Hebrew National School, which was reviewed and excerpted by Hyman Grinstein in the early 1940s,[77] and from the partial records of the Educational Institute.[78]

Jewish Day Schools in New York City, 1842–1860

Synagogue	***Date(s) Founded***	***Date Closed***
B'nai Jeshurun	1842, 1853	1847, 1855
Ansche Chesed	1845	1857
Rodeph Shalom	1845	(before 1857)
Shaarey Hashamayim	1845	(before 1857)
Emanu-El	1850	(before 1860)
Shaarey Zedek	1853	Jan. 1857
Shearith Israel[79]	1855	(before 1860)

Shaarey Zedek was the first congregation to erect its own school building; other schools used existing vestry rooms or rented quarters. When their school building opened 1 December 1853, among the dignitaries invited to present a toast was the young alderman William M. Tweed, not yet the infamous "Boss" Tweed. Tweed rose through the political ranks serving immigrant neighborhoods, and here was an opportunity to see and be seen among a new and growing group.[80] The Jewish congregation, for its part, felt sufficiently confident of its place in society to call on a government officeholder, who saw it as politic to accept.

The school opened with fifty students on 6 December 1853. Its hours were Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM. (with an hour recess for lunch) and Sundays from 9:00 AM to noon. The principal Hebrew teacher, the Rev. M.S. Cohen, along with his assistant, Mr. Moritz Zepler, gave instruction in Hebrew reading, translation of Hebrew into English, grammar, writing, *Shulhan Aruhk* (code of Jewish law and its application to daily life), cantilation (chanting Torah), *Tanach* (The Five Books of Moses), and Torah commentaries. The school offered a full secular course of study in its English department. Mr. Van Epps was selected as its principal, assisted by Miss A.K. Homer, who was responsible for educating the girls. English instruction included reading,

writing, spelling, arithmetic, grammar, geography, use of maps, ancient and modern history, composition, bookkeeping, and natural philosophy, "including every other branch of a finished English Education."[81] Girls also received instruction in plain needle work and drawing. The intention was to provide a secular education on a par with any American school. They sought experienced teachers "for the English Department, Teachers who have been trained in one of the American Normal Schools will be preferred."[82]

The school did not neglect religious practice or moral instruction. With echoes of the public school debate, the laws and regulations of the school stated that

> It shall be imperative on the Hebrew Teachers respectively to read or have read in the School daily… some portion of Holy Writ from the Bible *in English* and to address them daily on some scriptural or moral subject—The religious and moral training of the pupils being an essential Branch of the School Business. [emphasis added][83]

In addition, each school day was to open and close with prayer, in both Hebrew and English, and students were expected to attend Sabbath services along with their Hebrew teachers.

Unfortunately, the school was hardly launched before it encountered financial problems. Loans and promissory notes had to be arranged to pay for building construction, and additional money had to be raised to support operations. The school charged fees (from four dollars per quarter in the first class to seven dollars per quarter for the fourth and highest class), but many parents did not pay. This was especially irritating to congregation members when the derelict parents were not congregants. In November 1854 the synagogue board "Resolved that this [school] Committee do not feel themselves authorized to admit children into the School without pay more especially such whose parents are not members of the Congregation."[84] The nonpayment of fees continued, as did enrollment of children of nonmembers: By the spring of 1854, fifty-four of the ninety pupils enrolled were nonmembers' children. At that time expenses for the school (most probably on an annual basis) was $1,850, but income from student fees totaled only $1,540, with the congregation making up the difference.[85] The school's record breaks off at this point, although it continued to operate until January 1857.

We know less about the B'nai Jeshurun Educational Institute because the school's records have not survived. However, the minute books of the parent organization, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, include some relevant information.[86] We know it had both Hebrew and English departments, along the lines described for the Hebrew National School. In addition to Hebrew and English, it also taught German and French. Financial concerns are paramount in the minutes of the synagogue board meetings. The congregation backed the school's build-

ing loan and subsequent mortgage and was called on to make up for shortfalls in income. The minutes indicate persistent friction between synagogue board members and the board of directors of the Educational Institute. The school was accused of mismanagement, poor communications with the synagogue board, and a lack of respect and attention the synagogue trustees believed were their due.[87] The school's board of directors ultimately concluded that the school could not be self-governed nor self-financed and proposed returning the responsibility of the school back to the congregation itself.[88] B'nai Jeshurun's board did not receive this proposal enthusiastically, but it did try to help the school collect the substantial amount of overdue school fees.[89]

The situation reached crisis proportions in the spring of 1855, when a special meeting of the entire congregation was held to hear "A Report on the Financial Condition of the Educational Institute and for the Adoption of Measures to prevent the necessity of Closing the School."[90] No plan was adopted and again, on 2 September 1855, a committee was formed "for purpose of making a final effort to continue the School."[91] The committee recommended to the board, on 28 October 1855, that the school be closed on Thursday, 1 November, and that the teachers be notified and paid through that date.[92] Thus, with only three days' notice, the school was closed. By mid-January 1856, a lease was concluded with Mr. A. Loewe, who used the existing building for a private Jewish day school.[93]

The proximate cause of the demise of the synagogue-sponsored day schools was inadequate finances. Jewish education, at least for the well-to-do, did not end with the closing of these schools. Several private Jewish schools survived for decades,[94] and congregations founded supplementary schools in the late 1850s to provide instruction in Jewish subjects to children of congregation members. The problem of sustaining Jewish schools appears to have been twofold: the economics of mass education and inherent interest in Jewish studies.

The economics of Jewish education is intimately tied to the nature of Jewish communal organization. There was no unified *hevrah,* or Jewish community, in New York City in the 1850s. There were a dozen or more Jewish congregations of varying religious expression, each established to serve its members. As the German Jewish community grew, many new, often poor, immigrants could not afford to become "seat-holders" in an established synagogue. Some organized informal *minyanim* (prayer groups) with modest space (in rented quarters or member' homes) and few financial resources—far too few to afford day schools. There was no legally binding *kahal* (Jewish society) in New York City as in many European countries, nor was there even a locally established tradition of collectively providing communal services, such as Jewish education to all the children. Individual congregations might be able to provide a modest financial supplement to a school if limited to members' children and if most members had sufficient wealth to pay for their own children's school fees. But if a school

enrolled children of nonmembers, and parents did not or could not pay fees, individual congregations lacked the wealth to support broad-scale free education. In the absence of community-wide financial support, a mass Jewish educational system could not survive. Those with wealth could send their children to private Jewish schools, but those with modest means, the norm for recent immigrants, could not. The Jewish community was not sufficiently integrated or organized to provide free Jewish education to all its children.

Even if funding were available, was there sufficient interest in Jewish studies to call forth support for Jewish schools? Many of the German Jewish immigrants had received a modest Jewish education in their homelands. It was not a learned community, but a community of peddlers, small-businessmen, and artisans. As Hasia Diner, a scholar of these immigrants, concluded, "[T]he youthful migrants had few skills and had little education in either secular or religious fields."[95]

German Jewish immigrants did come with a background in secular studies. This was due, in part, to government pressure to acculturate Jews as a precondition for civil emancipation. "Governments [in German lands] deemed that equality of rights was appropriate only for Jews who were educated to be at home in the non-Jewish world, and gradually even traditional Jews became at least acquiescent to their children receiving a basic secular education."[96] In Prussia in 1847, half of all Jewish children attended Christian schools. When German Jews immigrated to New York, many were familiar both with secular studies and with sending their children to school with Christians. As secular studies increased, Jewish studies shrank in the curriculum.[97]

The dearth of American Jewish teachers knowledgeable in Jewish subjects, and changes in religious beliefs and practices among some German Jews—which would later give rise to Reform Judaism—reinforced the decline in Jewish studies. In addition, the desire to achieve full emancipation and integration into civil society led "some Jews to believe that their religion too should be made less foreign to its milieu."[98] Hence, many Jewish parents sent their children to Christian schools, providing them with supplementary Jewish education after school hours.

The changes in religious practices among "reforming" Jews resulted in less emphasis on the Hebrew language in ritual and religious practice and less dedication to textual study and commentaries, but greater emphasis on Judaism's moral principles and ethical guidance. Judaism was increasingly recast as a religion among religions rather than a separate and segregated way of life. From a social community "ordering its life on the basis of halakhah [law], Judaism was becoming a 'Konfession.'… the dogmatic content of Judaism… was stressed, its beliefs and creedal affirmations, at the expense of the now more or less dispensable 'Ceremonial Law.'"[99]

As Judaism changed, Jewish educational practices followed suit. There was a decline in the study of Hebrew; an increase in the use of textbooks, especially catechisms, rather than religious texts; and reduced attention to religious ceremony and practices.[100] The changes in religious understanding and practices of "reforming" Jews facilitated their integration into American society. Unlike the German states, this was a nation where civil emancipation was freely available, where the German Jewish project of emancipation could be realized by enacting it in one's own life.

Jewish education, therefore, did not need to be offered in separately sponsored Jewish schools. One could send one's children to public schools or Christian private schools. Jewish education could be condensed, as many Jews of the day believed, and presented in catechetical form and offered in supplementary schools.[101] One by one the synagogues of New York City, reforming as well as more traditional, adopted catechisms for their supplementary schools; the first in New York City, in 1850, was prepared by the Rev. Dr. Merzbacher, the rabbi of Congregation Ansche Chesed.[102]

When one combines the inability of the Jewish community to fund mass Jewish education, the declining interest in rigorous Hebrew and textual studies, and the desire to integrate into the larger American civic community, it becomes easier to understand the wholesale collapse of Jewish day schools in the mid-1850s. When we add to this the relative liberalization due to the Educational Consolidation Law of 1853, which reduced the Christian character of public education and gave greater power to local wards to oversee schoolbooks and practices (hence more directly influenced by the interests and concerns of local constituents), the public schools appeared even more attractive to German Jewish parents. And finally, we need to take note of contemporary economic conditions. The decline of the day schools was coterminous with the banking Panic of 1854–1855 and the more severe Panic of 1857.[103] These were not good times for congregations to raise funds, especially to support the education of nonmembers. Free, "relatively" religiously tolerant public schools must have looked particularly attractive. As Grinstein concluded, "[W]hen the free public schools were… secularized, Jewish children flocked to them, and the all-day Jewish school where a tuition fee was charged collapsed."[104]

The relative attraction of the free public schools was further enhanced by the elimination of the Lancasterian system, improved teacher preparation, new and impressive school buildings, and the potential prize of a free college education for those who graduated from public schools and passed the entrance exams to the Free Academy.

By the late 1850s, most of New York's Jewish students—and indeed, Jewish students across the United States—enrolled in the public schools. Lloyd Gartner has determined that by 1860 most Jewish students were already integrated into American public schools.[105] Public school attendance became the very mark of

American membership and was promoted by the German Jewish community among themselves and among the great wave of East European Jewish immigrants who began to arrive in New York City in the 1880s. Segregated Jewish schools become anathema; public schools were the only training ground for true integration.

> We have no right to open sectarian schools [claims the New York Hebrew Free School Association, which ran supplementary schools]. We cannot, dare not, and must not deprive our children of the benefits of our public schools, the efficiency of which we would never be able to reach or attain. They should and must mingle with children of all nationalities, creeds, and social grades, to grow up to mutual respect, thereby helping us and themselves to break down all barriers of race and creed.[106]

Gartner concluded that as early as the 1860s American Jews believed that "attending public schools and guarding them from sectarianism was the interest and patriotic obligation of American Jews."[107] Here, it was believed, their equality was self-evident and their future within American society assured.

Jews and Catholics in Protestant America: Alternative Paths

The liberal religious consensus in New York City was shaken in 1859. The board of education, over strong opposition and spurred on by City Superintendent Randall, approved changes to the school system's bylaws, making Bible reading compulsory at the start of each school day.[108] Now "all the public schools of this city… shall be opened by the reading of a portion of the Holy Scriptures, without note or comment."[109] For several decades this bylaw was in force, an end-run around state education law, but with sufficient political support to remain in place. The Bible was still read in school assemblies in New York City (and State) well into the 1950s.

The change in bylaws must be read against the backdrop of accelerating immigration and its perceived threat to the established order. By 1860, 47 percent of the city's population was foreign born. If you include the American-born children of immigrants, immigrants' families made up more than half of the city's residents. Schools were the established class's first line of cultural defense, and this class depended on them to Americanize immigrants and teach them Christian morality (anchored in the Bible) to protect the city against crime, vice, pauperism, and chaos.

Most Jewish students were now enrolled in the public schools. There was little chance of turning back. Their Jewish day schools had closed, and it was unlikely that wary congregations would soon leap into new school sponsorships. The goal of the community, many of whom were now entering their second generation in America, was integration, and the public schools were a means to that end. They could live with Bible reading as long as schoolbooks were not

discriminatory and Christian prayers not obligatory. They could speak to Boss Tweed and his colleagues on both sides of the aisle to bring pressure on ward trustees to keep schools as ecumenically friendly as they could.

Bible reading still had symbolic value for the Protestant establishment—the last display of the political dominance they were losing quickly. Jews seemed to understand that religious instruction had, in fact, been removed from the public schools and that Bible reading—without note or comment—recitation of the Lord's Prayer, and the singing of hymns were vestigial practices that had lost their "original intent" and could be ignored.

Although many Catholic children still attended public schools, the Catholic hierarchy had rejected public schools and set out to create a parallel school system of their own.[110] Jews at the time did not follow their fellow immigrants—Irish and German Catholics—into educational separatism, but came to identify more closely with Protestant America and with its public schools. Their desire to accommodate and integrate themselves into American society led them to the schools of the dominant culture.

By the Civil War, the Jews of New York were committed to public education. At the end of the nineteenth century they became the shepherds guiding their coreligionists from eastern Europe into public schools, where they would be transformed and "Americanized" into the very models of modern American citizens.[111] For a century and a half, the Jewish presence in New York City's public schools contributed to the system's legitimacy. By entering and working from within, Jews hastened the diversification of the school's student body and secularization of its instruction.

What if New York's Catholics had been able to reach a compromise with the New York City Board of Education and their children had been incorporated into the public schools? Conversely, what if it had been decided that public funds should be distributed to all religious denominations? What would have been the fate of religious and moral education and of tolerance for diversity?

These questions, while hypothetical, have real implications for today's education. With the considerable growth of Jewish day schools and the significant decline in Catholic school enrollments, with discussions of vouchers, charter schools, and school choice, how will the landscape of schooling be altered? What will children of different religious, racial, ethnic, class, and ideological backgrounds learn, not just from their lessons, but from the nature of the schools they attend and the classmates with whom they study? What lessons will they not learn because they do not attend school with the children of groups who find the public schools unacceptable?

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Notes

*It is an honor to participate in this issue of *The American Jewish Archives Journal* honoring Naomi W. Cohen, my colleague at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Living as I do in the nineteenth century, I have benefited immensely from the work of my fellow time-traveler. I have long relied on Naomi's prodigious contributions to the field of American Jewish history, especially her clear and accurate narratives and illuminating insights. This article attempts to build upon the firm scholarly foundation she has provided to all of us.

[1]I wish to gratefully acknowledge the financial and moral support of the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, which has enabled me to carry out research and writing on this project.

[2]Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press; and New York: The New York Historical Society, 1995), 149, 922, 933.

[3]A small proportion of Irish were Protestant, but German immigration was more varied: Approximately one-third of German immigrants were Catholics, nearly two-thirds Lutherans, and a small proportion Jewish.

[4]Jews who emigrated from middle Europe came from many lands and political jurisdictions, from Alsace-Lorraine on the west to Prussian-controlled Posen in western Poland. For a discussion of the German Jewish immigration, see Hasia Diner, "Immigration, German" in *Jewish-American History and Culture: an Encyclopedia*, ed. Jack Fischel and Sanford Pinsker (New York and London: Garland, 1992), 255–258.

[5]Ira Rosenwaike, *On the edge of Greatness: A Portrait of American Jewry in the Early National Period* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1985), 31.

[6]Deborah Dash Moore, "New York City," in *Jewish-American History and Culture*, 461.

[7]New York (City) - Public Schools [*sic*; Common Council], "Report of the Committee on Arts and Sciences and Schools of the Board of Assistants, on the subject of Appropriating a portion of the School Money to Religious Societies, for the support of Schools." Document No. 80 (New York: n.p., 1840), 375. Documents related to petitions for school funds, debates in the City Council, and legislative enactments are located in the Board of Education Archives, housed in the New York City Municipal Archives.

[8]For the founding and a sympathetic history of the Public School Society, see William Oland Bourne, *History of the Public School Society of the City of New York with Portraits of the Presidents of the Society* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1971) (reprint of 1870 original edition); see also Carl F. Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), esp. ch. 3; A. Emerson Palmer, *The New York Public School: Being a History of Free Education in the City of New York* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1905), chs. 1–12. For a more recent overview and assessment, see Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: New York City, 1805–1973* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 27–76. The children of freed blacks attended schools run by the African Free School Society, the first of which opened in 1787. The PSS eventually took over control of these schools but ran them as separate schools for blacks. When the board of education was established, they too ran separate "colored" schools, and it was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century that school integration took place in New York City.

[9]The Free School Society of New York, *An Account of the Free-School Society of New-York* (New York: Collins and Co., 1814), 4.

[10]New York City Common Council, "Report of the Committee on Arts and Sciences and Schools of the Board of Assistants, on the subject of Appropriating a portion of the School Money to Religious Societies, for the support of Schools," Document no. 80 (1840), 335–336, Board of Education Archives, New York City Municipal Archives.

[11]Ibid., 336. Bishop Hughes was not happy that the Jews and Scotch Presbyterians joined his suit, believing it was opportunistic on their part and fearing that it would raise concerns regarding a rush of requests from other denominations for a share of school funds.

[12]For a discussion of this critical encounter between the Roman Catholic Church and the public authorities, see Vincent Peter Lannie, "William Seward and Common School Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 4 (Sept. 1964): 181–192. For a conflicting viewpoint on Seward and the Catholic schools, see John W. Pratt, "Governor Seward and the New York City School Controversy, 1840–1842: A Milestone in the Advance of Nonsectarian Public Education," *New York History* 42, no. 4 (Oct. 1961): 351–364, and his "Religious Conflict in the Development of the New York City Public School System," *History of Education Quarterly* 5 (June 1965): 110–120. Lannie's response to Pratt is in his "William Seward and the New York School Controversy, 1840–1842," *History of Education Quarterly* 6 (Spring 1966): 52–71. See also Lannie's *Public Money and Parochial Education. Bishop Hughes, Governor Seward and the New York School Controversy* (Cleveland, OH: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1968); and Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 3–76.

[13]William R. Huchison, *Religious Pluralism in America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 4–5.

[14]See, for example, John Hughes, "The Decline of Protestantism, and its Cause," (a lecture delivered in St. Patrick's Cathedral, 10 November 1850) in *Complete Works of the Most Rev. John Hughes, D.D., Archbishop of New York* 2, ed. Lawrence Kehoe (New York: Lawrence Kehoe, 1865), 87–102.

[15]John Hughes to Archbishop Blanc (New Orleans), New York, 3 January 1852. Henry Browne Papers, Box 6, file "Hughes Correspondence," Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

[16]"Report on Education: Presented to the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, at its session in New York, October, 1841," *Journal of Christian Education and Family and Sunday-School Visitor* 3, nos. 11/12 (November and December 1841): v–vi.

[17]Presbyterian Church in the USA Board of Education, "Report of the Board of Education of the Presbyterian Church on Parochial Schools," presented to the General Assembly, May 1847 (Philadelphia: Board of Education, Wm. S. Martien, Printer, 1847), 10.

[18]Timothy L. Smith, "Protestant Schooling and American Nationality, 1800–1850," *Journal of American History* 53 (1967): 679–695.

[19]Ibid., 351–352.

[20]New York City Common Council, "Report of the Committee on Arts and Sciences and Schools," 339–340.

[21]Ibid., 353.

[22]Ann M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790–1880* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 59.

[23]Edward K. Spann, *The New Metropolis: New York City, 1840–1857* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 337–340.

[24]New York City Common Council, "Report of the Committee on Arts and Sciences and Schools," 355.

[25]For Madison's arguments, see Garry Wills, *Head and Heart: American Christianities* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007), 206–209. For the text of Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance," see Edwin S. Gaustad, *A Documentary History of Religion in America to the Civil War*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eardmans, 1993), 262–267.

[26]Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 44.

[27]New York City Board of Education, "Report of the Select Committee to which was referred a Communication from the Trustees of the Fourth Ward, in relation to the Sectarian character of certain Books in use in the Schools of that Ward," 11 October 1843, Board of Education Archives, New York City Municipal Archives.

[28]Ibid., 5.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Eliza Robbins, *American Popular Lessons, Chiefly Selected from the Writings of Mrs. Barbauld, Miss Edgeworth, and other Approved Authors. Designed Particularly for the Younger Classes of Children in Schools. New York* (New York: W.B. Gilley, 1827). There were also editions in 1829, 1839, and 1848, the last revised in consultation with the Public School Society. In the introduction to the 1848 edition, Robbins writes that she "is greatly indebted to several of the very intelligent and conscientious gentlemen who formed the book committee of the Public School Society for suggestions of improvements which might render this book more effective," v.

[31]Ibid., 1848 ed., v.

[32]Ibid., 1827 ed., 158.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid., 1848 ed., 145. This story was not in the 1827 edition but had to be in the edition to which complaints were directed, since it is cited by name. This was probably the 1839 edition.

[35]New York City Board of Education, "Report of the Select Committee to which was referred a Communication," 6.

[36]Ibid., 7.

[37]Ibid., 9.

[38]Ibid., 10.

[39]Mark A. Noll, "The Image of the United States as a Biblical Nation, 1776–1865," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 44–45.

[40]Smith, "Protestant Schooling," 679–680.

[41]Naomi W. Cohen, *Jews in Christian America: the Pursuit of Religious Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 37.

[42]New York City Board of Education, "Report of the Select Committee to which was referred a Communication from the Trustees of the Fourth Ward," 16.

[43]Ibid., 17.

[44]Ibid., 21.

[45]New York City Board of Education, "Report of the Committee on the Annual Apportionment, on the communications of the County Superintendent, relative to the use of THE BIBLE in the Public Schools of the City of New York" (New York: Office of the "Morning News" [corner of Beekman and Nassau Streets], 1844), 4.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Ibid., 7.

[48]See Hughes, quoted in Henry J. Browne, "The Archdiocese of New York a Century Ago: a memoir of Archbishop Hughes, 1838–1858," *Historical Records and Studies* 39/40 (1952): 154–155.

[49]*Thirty-second Annual Report of the New-York Sunday School Union, Auxiliary to the American Sunday School Union, for the year ending May 1848* (New York: Printed by John Gray, 1848), 11. The excerpt is from School No. 75, 124 Houston Street. The site is a public school where the Sunday school classes were held.

[50]Ibid., 19.

[51]Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 417: "In the words of the Edwardsians, it was the preaching of 'plain gospel truths, with which the people had long been acquainted, and had heard with indifference.' These 'plain gospel truths' were God's absolute sovereignty, man's total depravity, and Christ's atoning love."

[52]Documents of the Board of Education, City of New York, May 1850 to December 1852, No. 1, "Remarks of Erastus C. Benedict, Esq., on his re-election as President of the Board of Education, at its organization, January 14, 1852," 6–7, Board of Education Archives, New York City Municipal Archives.

[53]Ibid., 7–8.

[54]Such a position was strongly disputed by minister-educators such as Benjamin Orrs Peers. See his *American Education: or Strictures on the Nature, Necessity, and Practicability of a System of National Education, Suited to the United States* (New York: John S. Taylor, Theological and Sunday-School Bookseller, Brick Church Chapel, 1838), 48, 50.

[55]Board of Education, "Remarks of Erastus C. Benedict, Esq.," 8.

[56]Ibid., 8–9.

[57]He served under his brother, New York Secretary of State Henry Randall, who, as holder of this office, also held the position of state superintendent of common schools.

[58]"Report of the City Superintendent," 9, bound with *The Thirteenth Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City and County of New York, for the Year ending January 1, 1855* (New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., 1855).

[59][Henry Stephens Randall], "Decision of the State Superintendent of Schools, on the Right to Compel Catholic Children to Attend Prayer, and to Read and Commit Portions of the Bible, as School Exercises," State of New York, Secretary's Office, Department of Common Schools, Albany, NY, 27 October 1853.

[60]*Laws Related to Public Instruction in the City of New York. An Act to amend, consolidate, and reduce to one Act, the various Acts relative to the Common Schools of the City of New York. Passed July 3, 1851. As Amended by the Acts severally entitled "An Act Relative to Common Schools in the city of New York."* Passed 4 June 1853, 31 March 1854, 15 April 1854. The revised laws were published in the *Manual of the Board of Education of the City and County of New York, March 1856* (New York: Printed by Edward O. Jenkins, 1856). Among other things, this law provided for the PSS to be incorporated into the board of education and for its schools to become ward schools. The board also received the PSS headquarter's building, on Elm and Grand streets, which then became the new board of education headquarters. Significantly, it placed the seat of public education in the epicenter of the city's rapidly growing immigrant Irish and German (i.e., Catholic, Protestant and Jewish) populations, and just one block from the B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue on Elm Street.

[61]Ibid., 21.

[62]This is similar to the provisions of Massachusetts school laws of 1827 and 1835, the application of which embroiled Horace Mann in intense religious controversy with orthodox (Trinitarian) Protestants. See Raymond B. Culver, *Horace Mann and Religion in the Massachusetts Public Schools* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), esp. ch. 4; and Jonathan Messerli, *Horace Mann: a Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 309–344.

[63]Ibid., 85.

[64]The first English translation of the Bible under Jewish auspices in America was produced by Isaac Leeser in 1853. Hence before that date there was no possibility of using an American "Jewish" version of the Bible.

[65]The decision to drop notes and comments from the King James translation of the Bible was part of the effort to find common ground among the disparate groups under the umbrella of the Church of England, from Puritans on the one hand to High Church adherents on the

other. The Bible, without commentary, enabled one translation to serve all groups. A similar situation held nearly two centuries later in the United States; the many Protestant sects could read the same translation, unencumbered by interpretive notes. Each sect could arrive at its own interpretation, but they could all unite to form the American Bible Society to distribute Bibles across the United States. For a full discussion of the translation project that yielded the "King James Bible," see Benson Bobrick, *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution it Inspired* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2001); Adam Nicolson, *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

[66]Quoted in Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 45.

[67]For elaboration of the Catholic position and its implications for the Irish Catholic community of New York City, see Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 46–57.

[68]Stephan F. Brumberg, "First Lessons on Learning to be American and Jewish: The Philadelphia Experience," paper presented at Hunter College, 24 April 2002.

[69]Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System*, 89.

[70]*Sixteenth Annual Report of the Board of Education, Dec. 30, 1857* (New York: Department of Public Instruction, 1858), 26.

[71]Ibid., 27.

[72]Ibid., 29.

[73]Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 30–61.

[74]Alexander M. Dushkin, *Jewish Education in New York City* (New York: The Bureau of Jewish Education, 1918), 32. Dushkin reports twelve synagogues in New York City in 1850. In 1842, however, there were between six and eight (depending on actual dates of founding, which are not well established for several congregations). By the mid-1850s, however, a majority of congregations, including some recently founded ones, had established schools.

[75]Hyman B. Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York, 1654–1860* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1945), 240.

[76]The principal sources of information on Jewish day schools are Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York*, 225–259; Jeremiah J. Berman, "The Return to the Jewish Day School," *Conservative Judaism* 7, no. 2 (Jan. 1951): 1–13; Dushkin, *Jewish Education*; and Stephan F. Brumberg, "Jewish Education," in *Jewish-American History and Culture: an Encyclopedia*, 304–313.

[77]Hyman B. Grinstein, "An Early Parochial School," *Jewish Education* 13, no.1 (April 1941): 23–33. Unfortunately, the minute book cannot be located.

[78]"Minute Book of the Trustees [of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun]," 1825–1838; "B'nai Jeshurun Board of Trustees Minutes," 1854–1865, and the "B'nai Jeshurun Congregational Meeting Minutes Book," 1848–1882, all in the collection of the Rattner Center and housed in the Rare Books Library, The Jewish Theological Seminary, New York. Unfortunately, the minute book of the B'nai Jeshurun Educational Institute does not appear to have survived.

[79]Shearith Israel, New York City's first and only congregation until 1825, intermittently sponsored a day school starting about 1808, known as the Polonies Talmud Torah. However, after 1821 it was run as an evening supplementary school. In the 1810s and 1820s this congregation received a share of the New York State common school funds to support poor Jewish children enrolled in its school. When church schools were no longer able to share in the common school fund, the Polonies Talmud Torah also lost its share; this may be one of the reasons for its demise as a day school.

[80]Grinstein, "An Early Parochial School," 27–28. Tweed's toast was as follows: "The City and State of New York. May it ever remain the Seat of peace and plenty—and the liberal advocates of philanthropy and Freedom."

[81]Ibid., 28.

[82]Grinstein, "An Early Parochial School," 26. The cited passage was from the school's August 1853 advertisement in the Jewish weekly, the *Asmonean*.

[83]Ibid., 30.

[84]Ibid., 32.

[85]Ibid., 33.

[86]"Minute Book of the Trustees [of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun]," 1825–1838; "B'nai Jeshurun Board of Trustees Minutes," 1854–1865, and the "B'nai Jeshurun Congregational Meeting Minutes Book," 1848–1882. See, for example, the entries in the board of trustees minutes for 30 April 1854, 7 May 1854, 14 May 1854, 22 May 1854, 31 August 1854, 21 September 1854, 16 October 1854, 27 November 1854, 14 December 1854, 31 December 1854, 18 January 1855, 14 February 1855, 15 March 1855, every board meeting in the months of April and May of 1855, 1 November 1855, 25 November 1855, 6 January 1856, 15 January 1856, and the final entry in the congregational minutes regarding the school, 11 February 1856.

[87]Ibid., 9 August 1854 and 10 September 1854.

[88]Ibid., 21 September 1854.

[89]Ibid., 27 November 1854.

[90]B'nai Jeshurun Congregational Meeting Minute Book, 1848–1882, 29 April 1855.

[91]Ibid., 2 September 1855.

[92]Board of Trustees Minutes, 28 October 1855.

[93]Ibid., 6 January, 15 January, and 11 February 1856.

[94]For a discussion of private Jewish day schools, see Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York*, 245–247; Alexander M. Dushkin, *Jewish Education in New York City*, 49–50; and Stephan F. Brumberg, "Jewish Education," 306–307.

[95]Hasia Diner, "Immigration, Jewish," 256; see also Michael A. Meyer, ed., *German-Jewish History in Modern Times, vol. 2: Emancipation and Acculturation, 1780–1871* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 111–119; and Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York*, 226.

[96]Meyer, ed., *German-Jewish History*, 112.

[97]Ibid., 117.

[98]Ibid., 119.

[99]Jakob J. Petuchowski, "Manuals and Catechisms of the Jewish Religion in the Early Period of Emancipation," in *Studies in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Intellectual History*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 62–63.

[100]Ibid., 62f.; Cf. Dianne Ashton, "The Feminization of Jewish Education," *Transformations* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 15; Lance Sussman, *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 80–101; Grinstein, "An Early Parochial School," 23–33; Jeremiah J. Berman, "Jewish Education in New York City, 1860–1900," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 9 (1954): 247–275; Brumberg, "Jewish Education," 304–312.

[101]Ibid. The first "elementary" catechism produced for an American Jewish Sunday school was by Mrs. Eliezar Pyke, *Scriptural Questions for the use of Sunday Schools for the Instruction of Israelites* (Philadelphia: printed privately, 1840). Isaac Leeser, *hazzan* at Congregation Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia, published his *Catechism for Younger Children. Designed as a Familiar Exposition of the Jewish Religion* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Author by Adam Waldie, 5599 [1839]), which went through four editions. Many others were published in the United States through the remainder of the nineteenth century. The importance of textbooks in all of American education in the nineteenth century is supported by extensive studies of Ruth Miller Elson, documented in her *Guardians of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1964).

[102]*Catechism of the Faith and Moral Obligations, of an Israelite, for the Use of Schools & Private Families*, translated from a German work of Dr. S. Herxheimer, rabbi at Bernburg, by Dr. Felsenheld and David Barnard, professor of Hebrew, as revised by the Rev. Dr. Merzbacher, under the patronage of Congregation Anshe Chesed (congregation's name was written in Hebrew) (New York: Printed and for sale by Henry Frank, 5610 [1850]).

[103]Spann, *The New Metropolis*, 308–312, 394–395.

[104]Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York*, 244–245.

[105]Lloyd P. Gartner, "Temples of Liberty Unpolluted: American Jews and Public Schools, 1840–1875," in *A Bicentenial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus*, ed. Bertram W. Korn (Waltham, MA and New York: American Jewish Historical Society and KTAV, 1976), 164–166.

[106]*American Hebrew* (10 December 1880), cited in Berman, "Jewish Education," 262.

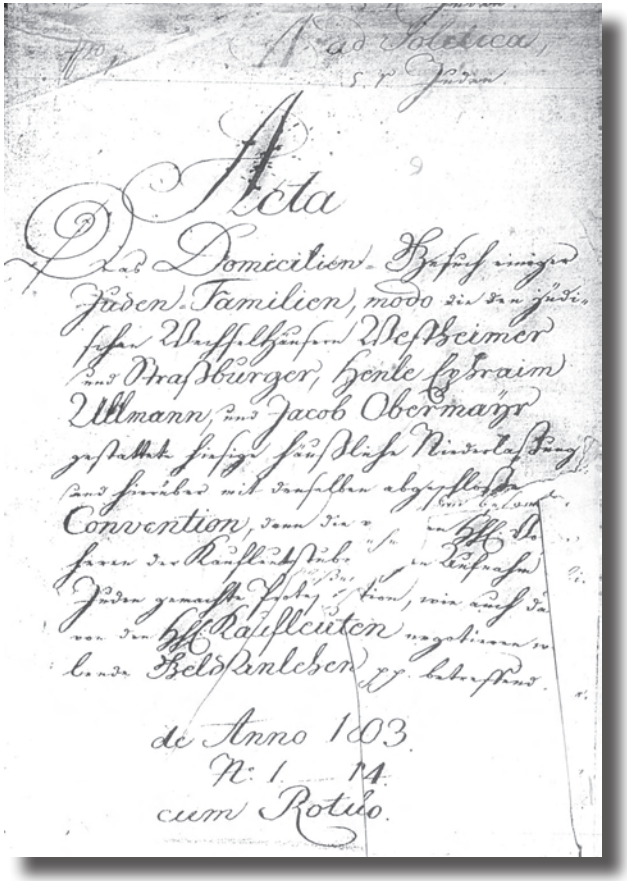
[107]Gartner, 182.

[108]*Journal of the Board of Education of the City of New York, 1859* (New York: Dudney & Russell, 1859), 163, 196, 201.

[109]*Manual of the Board of Education, 1860* (title page destroyed; no place, no date, presumably New York, 1860), 9. Enforcement sections follow detailing the reporting procedures for noncompliance and subsequent teacher dismissal, 79–80.

[110]Rev. J.A. Burns, *The Growth and Development of the Catholic School System in the United States* (New York: Benziger Bros., 1912); Martin Lazerson, "Understanding American Catholic Educational History," *History of Education Quarterly* (Fall 1977): 297–317.

[111]See Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School: The Jewish Immigrant Public School Encounter in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (New York: Praeger, 1986).


Acta
Domicilien
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Jacob Obermayr
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First page from act granting domicile rights to Jacob Obermayer, Henle Ephraim Ulmann, and the Munich bankers Strassburger and Westheimer.

(Courtesy Obermayer family records)

"Not Quite 'Our Crowd'"[1]: The Trajectory of the Obermayer Family, 1618–2009

Kenneth Libo[2]

Some years ago, I began research on the German branch of Arthur Obermayer's family while Michael Feldberg of the American Jewish Historical Society began work on the American branch. At our disposal was an enormous family archive containing material from congregational records, official documents, vital statistics, out-of-print books, tombstone inscriptions, marriage records, wills, death certificates, pamphlets, clippings, memoirs, and correspondence. Arthur Obermayer had assembled the archive over the years in a tireless quest to uncover his family's history from seventeenth-century South Germany to twenty-first-century America.[3] It did not take long to realize that in the course of several generations, members of Arthur's family had occupied practically every one of the limited positions open to Jews in South Germany before the middle of the nineteenth century—from court Jews, Jewish communal leaders, and major philanthropists to *schacherhaendlers* (hagglers), *schnorrers* (scroungers) and *schmoozers* (sellers of information, from the Hebrew *shemu'ot*, meaning hearsay, rumors, idle chatter).

Arthur Obermayer had traced this lineage back to the Tauber Valley farming villages of Creglingen and Archshofen, the manufacturing and trading center of Fürth, and the imperial city of Augsburg and nearby Kriegshaber.[4] Though these places are no more than a few hours apart, each has a unique Jewish history. Residence rights for Jews in Augsburg had been revoked in 1438 and were not reinstated until 1803, when a number of Jewish bankers, including an Obermayer, obtained such rights for themselves in return for paying Napoleon *not* to enter the city. Jews in Creglingen and Archshofen, on the other hand, enjoyed the right for centuries to own property and live practically anywhere they wanted to in these towns.[5] In contrast, Fürth's Jews were permitted to live only in certain areas.[6]

For premodern Jews in German-speaking lands, expulsion often meant moving to a nearby town. Thus, Jews expelled from Augsburg in 1438 had the option of relocating nearby where more tolerant magistrates, for a price, gave them residence rights. In contrast, the Jews of England, the Iberian Peninsula, and France had been subject to nationwide expulsions, and the Jews of tsarist Russia were confined to the Pale of Settlement.

As has often been the case in the history of the Diaspora, after living for generations in close proximity with gentiles, German Jews could not help but acquire the characteristics of the host population. Writes Gordon A. Craig:

> The family resemblance between the two people is striking and is evident in their industry, their thrift and frugality, their perseverance, their strong religious sense, the importance they place on the family, and their common respect for the printed word, which has made the Jews the People of the Book and the Germans *das Volk der Dichter und Denker*.[7]

"German Jews," adds Robert Seltzer, "also excelled at economic initiative and enterprise, communal responsibility and a sense of philanthropic duty."[8] These strengths were exemplified by Obermayer forebears Moses Maennlein, head of a foundation in his name for assisting Creglingen's needy Jews; Israel Lichtenstädter, founder in Fürth of the first Jewish orphanage in Germany; and the Obermayers of Augsburg and Kriegshaber, who opened doors hitherto closed to Jews.

Though the Obermayers do not have the cachet of the founders of "Our Crowd"—most of whom were well on their way to success before Arthur's ancestors arrived in the United States—they are nonetheless typical of families a social rung below who, cumulatively, have played a crucial role in strengthening Jewish values, the American economy, and peaceful co-existence. (Indeed, they may be considered to have played a far more crucial role than the "Our Crowd" set in shaping American Jewish communal values.) At least several dozen families enjoyed a comparable historical evolution from, at best, enlightened despotism to political and social influence of major importance. Their impact on America and American Judaism continues to affect the lives of Jews today.

What follows is an account of how a representative "not quite 'Our Crowd'" family lived as Jews in South Germany and to what extent their German Jewishness survived and evolved in America.

The Road to Creglingen

While much of South Germany was Catholic, Creglingen and Archshofen fell under the authority of the margraves of Ansbach, a branch of the staunchly Protestant great electors of Brandenburg-Prussia. The family was inclined to look favorably upon Jews, as they did in 1670, when fifty Jews expelled from Vienna were issued letters of protection by authority of the great elector.

Until Napoleon altered the map of German-speaking Europe, the margraves of Ansbach held ultimate or near-ultimate authority over Jews living in the county of Ansbach in matters regarding population, residence rights, economic rights, and tax assessments. The margraves in premodern Germany were as likely to provide Jews with letters of protection as to expel them.[9] Simson of Reinsbronn (d. 1635), the first of Arthur Obermayer's ancestors to settle in Creglingen, received his letter of protection in 1618, at the onset of the Thirty Years' War.[10] Only gradually did anti-Jewish policies disappear through disuse. The last order of expulsion of a Jew was issued by Margrave Joachim Ernest in 1609.[11]

Hauptstrasse in Creglingen, c. 1900. Sinsheimer store and birthplace of Joseph Sinsheimer are visible on the right.
(Courtesy Obermayer family records)

Even before the Enlightenment, there were numerous indications in and around Ansbach pointing to the dawn of a new era.[12] Under the influence of Enlightenment ideas, the margraves of Ansbach grew increasingly tolerant of Jews, allowing them to settle in towns and villages in growing numbers.

By 1700, hundreds of Jewish families inhabited dozens of small population centers dotting the Ansbach countryside. In 1746, Margrave Charles William Frederic (1729–1757) allowed the Jews of the court city of Ansbach to build a synagogue.[13] By the end of the century, the Jews of Creglingen and Archshofen had either followed Ansbach's example,[14] or were about to.

The Ansbach margraves permitted Jews in their domains not only to own property but also to live among gentiles. Thus, Simson of Reinsbronn was granted not only residence rights for himself and his family as a buyer and seller of goods but also ownership of a house in the center of town on Badgasse (meaning "Bath Lane") 3. There he raised a growing family and lived for the rest of his life. Paying taxes must have strengthened Simson's sense of being a fellow Creglinger, as it would have for his son Isaak Simson (c. 1600–1667), known as "Isaac the Jew." In 1641, Isaac paid taxes on the house at Badgasse 3; that house remained in the family until the twentieth century.[15]

While Simson and his family survived the Thirty Years' War in Creglingen, much of the rest of South Germany was in shambles. Catholic marauders were killing Protestants and Protestants were killing Catholics, with Jews fair game for either side. Not even in a walled city like Creglingen were Jews safe. In 1631 Isaac Jekhuthiel was beaten to death by Swedes "in the synagogue." A year later, "Nathan the Jew" sent a desperate appeal to the municipal council of Creglingen:

> I'm still holding out in my poor little house in Obernzenn. The King's army as well as the Swedish army have ruined and plundered us through and through, including wife and child; taken everything away even to the last shirt and placed us in utmost poverty. They led me away twice on a rope.[16]

Despite such conditions, Simson of Reinsbronn and his descendents prospered in Creglingen as cattle dealers, wine merchants, and spice and salt traders. For generations they lived with their families, not in foul-smelling ghettos as in Fürth and Frankfurt, but on Badgasse and later on many other Creglingen streets, where Jews and gentiles lived side by side. With the exception of houses near the church, unless in need of rehabilitation, prospering Jews like Simson

and those who followed him could reside practically anywhere in Creglingen. By contrast, Jewish options in Fürth or Augsburg were far more circumscribed.

Moyses Isaac (c.1639–1704), like his father Isaac Simson and his grandfather Simson of Reinsbronn, was a pillar of the Jewish community. For many years he served as its *parnas* (president), in which capacity he mediated with the municipal council on matters such as the payment of taxes, the granting of privileges, and the disruption of order—as when two Jewish teachers from Aub came to Creglingen in 1659, had a fight on the street, and were fined ten taler. Jews in Creglingen at the time are described in yearly reports to the municipal council as "pious," "good hearted," "neighborly," and "well behaved."[17]

Moyses Isaac's grandson, Moyses Maennlein (1700–1786), served for many years as Creglingen's *parnas.* Moyses Maennlein also established a foundation for providing money to the poor on the anniversary of his death in return for their prayers; a dowry fund for the daughters of poor Jews; a tuition fund for poor Jewish boys; and five hundred guilders to build a new school for the Jews of Creglingen. Out of a deep-seated religious obligation to help the less fortunate, Moyses Maennlein made the following provisions in his will:

> First and foremost is the fear of the Lord! These are my orders!
>
> 1) I want 395 times four pennies, because the numerical value of the word "neshama" is 39… to be distributed when I am approaching death to observant and poor people nearby.
>
> 2) Upon my death, and between my dying and the burial, 26 times 3 pennies, the numerical value of the word "Elohim," is to be distributed among the poor and observant.
>
> 3) At the funeral, the poor and observant are to be given an amount equal to the numerical value of the word "levair" 18 pf, i.e. 3 fl: 49 ½ kr.[18]

Not everyone in Moyses Maennlein's family prospered. In 1799 a nephew, Hirsch Jacob, approached the Moyses Maennlein Foundation for help. Hirsch Jacob was a widower with eight children, four at home. He had no earnings and owned only the ramshackle house he and his children lived in, more than half of which was mortgaged. He asked for fifty guilders to pay small debts and buy bread. When it was discovered he had already gotten 150 guilders from Aaron Schwab, his request was denied.[19]

Moyses Maennlein's grandson Raphael Blumenfeld (1769–1854) was both a *warenhaendler* (merchant) and a *schacherhaendler*, depending on how well he was doing. In 1809 Raphael applied for funds to the Moyses Maennlein Foundation to buy bread for himself, his wife, and six children.[20] Only with the help of municipal property tax exemptions was Raphael able to hold on to a house he had inherited from a rich relation. Raphael's son Lazarus (1797–1886), a fellow *schacherhaendler,* was, unlike his father, educated in both Jewish and secular

subjects by a government-approved teacher. A reader of Friedrich Schiller (a set of whose works is listed in an appendix to his will), Lazarus might very well have experienced firsthand the pangs of German romanticism and nationhood.[21]

In Creglingen, Jews' lives changed little over the years.[22] Raphael's sons, who were mostly in the cattle trade, remained close to home. His sons-in-law were also in the cattle trade in neighboring towns and villages. As buyers and sellers, *schacherhaendlers* and *schmoozers*, they "sought out small farmers in their homes or met them at local markets, offering them… goods and information as well as buying agricultural products or lending money on the anticipated harvest or livestock production."[23]

Lazarus Blumenfeld lived with a wife and five children in three small rooms of a family house on Hauptstrasse 32. Lazarus might have been able to quote Schiller's Ode to Joy; yet he had to endure the constrictions and confinements of the life of a *schacherhaendler*. Only for succeeding generations of dissatisfied Blumenthals, Sinsheimers, and Oberndorfers, from whom Arthur descends, would the promise of a better life in America become a reality.

Augsburg/Kriegshaber

Over a period of three centuries, Simson Reinsbronn and his descendents owned and/or occupied no fewer than ten houses in Creglingen—on Badgasse, Hauptstrasse, Lindleinstrasse, Kreutzstrasse, and Stadtgraben. Conditions for Jews in Augsburg could not have been more different. As a result of pressure exerted by the Fuggers, Jews were expelled from Augsburg and, until 1803, could enter only with a daily pass and stay overnight only at designated places.

As earlier noted, in Germany expelled Jews might move to a neighboring jurisdiction, sometimes only half an hour away by carriage or chair or on foot. The Jews of Augsburg thus moved to nearby Kriegshaber, a part of the margravedom of Burgau. Burgau passed into the hands of the Holy Roman Emperor, who raised no objection to Jews settling there. By the time the Obermayers arrived, half of Kriegshaber was under the jurisdiction of the emperor, and half was under the jurisdiction of a local bishop.

As in Creglingen, "Kriegshaber's Jews enjoyed domicile rights," notes military historian and Obermayer biographer, Franz Josef Merkl;

> however, they were not free to reside among gentiles [as in Creglingen], but rather had to live in designated areas. They enjoyed the use of small farms, though, where they kept cattle. Some may have actually owned these farms, though pre-Napoleonic ownership for Jews was difficult as land could be sold only with the consent of the highest authority in the land. So it was for Christians and Jews alike until 1848 and the liberation of the farmers."[24]

The Obermayers trace their Kriegshaber ancestry back to Isaac Mayr, a butcher known in Kriegshaber in 1757 as Jud Hitzig. Isaac Mayr's son, Mayr

Isaak, was among the first in his family to take on the Obermayer name in conformity with a 1782 imperial *Toleranzedict* (edict of tolerance) issued by Hapsburg Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II. The edict forced Jews to take on family names as a means of identifying them with greater certainty on official documents and tax records. If there happened to be another family in Kriegshaber headed by another Mayr Isaak, "Obermayr" may have been the name chosen by the family living above the Untermayrs.[25]

A butcher in South Germany was often also a cattle dealer, a horse trader, a barterer of crops for manufactured goods, and someone who lent money to farmers to tide them over. So it was with Mayr Isaak's son Jacob Obermayer (1755–1828) who, during the Napoleonic Wars, provided horses, slaughtered cattle, and sold foodstuffs to army suppliers. Whatever he could buy from the farmers and sell to the army for a profit, he did. Obermayer historian Anke Joisten-Pruschke notes:

> Jacob normally leant money to farmers at relatively good interest rates, because he was interested in long term business relationships in which, if the partner does well, the lender does well. Jacob's own letters reveal an excellent German writing style in addition to an amazing grasp of the history of the topic at hand. Not only does he seem to know what to say and do; he also knows how to behave with all classes. I have looked through the guest book of a prominent industrial family named Sander of the Christian upper class, and in it often appears the names of Jacob Obermayer, his son Isidore, and his grandson Carl.[26]

Over the years Kriegshaber attracted several important banking families, including the Kaullas. Madame Kaulla, one of the most powerful court Jews in eighteenth century Germany, lent money to members of the Hohenzollern court and the Duke of Wuertemberg. During the Napoleonic Wars, Madame Kaulla's son, Veit Kaulla, moved to Kriegshaber and formed a partnership with Jacob Obermayer. On 27 August 1800 Jacob's brother Isaac (1764–1835) purchased from Veit Kaulla a house in Kriegshaber that later belonged to his son, Heinrich Obermayer. Heinrich's sons, Hermann and Jacob, were born there. Hermann was Arthur's grandfather.

Whereas the cattle trade remained central to the lives of those Obermayers who stayed in Kriegshaber, Jacob Obermayer, as a prospering banker, longed to share in the splendors of Augsburg. The opportunity arose when—in an effort to keep Napoleon's troops out of the city—Augsburg's city council borrowed money from Jacob Obermayer and Veit Kaulla as well as other Jewish bankers. In return, after a hiatus of three and a half centuries, the Jewish bankers and their families were granted residence rights in Augsburg, along with the right to be addressed as "Herr" instead of "Jud" in written salutations and on the street. For whatever reason—fear of competition, fear of a backlash—the first to arrive did what they could to keep other Jews out.[27]

Those Jews allowed back were not permitted to build a synagogue or engage in retail trading, nor could they bring with them more than one grown child, contingent on payment of a "recognition fee." Jacob tolerated all this in exchange for living with his family in a commodious townhouse on Domherrenhof, later the residence of the first bürgermeister of the city. Notes Anke Joisten-Pruschke:

> In lieu of building a synagogue, Jacob conducted prayer services in his home every day and on holidays, providing a special [T]orah ark and a bimah. Every Shabbat, every festival, no one had to go to Kriegshaber. The house still exists. It's close to the fruit market—the obst platz. Jacob Obermayer added a mikvah to that house. Since running water was needed, Jacob installed a tub that took water from the sky. A decade or so after Jacob died in 1828, only one old lady used the mikvah. After her death, women went to the Lech River.[28]

While Jacob and his brother Isaac were products of a traditional Jewish education, their children received secular educations at highly acclaimed institutions. Isaac's son Johann Jacob attended the illustrious Sachs School in Frankfurt, as did Jacob's son Isidore. Isidore's son Carl was enrolled in the oldest gymnasium in Augsburg, the St. Anna Elisee. As they moved up the socioeconomic ladder, all three went where few Jews in South Germany had gone before. In addition to cofounding Hypo-Bank, still an ongoing concern, Isidore was instrumental in building the first railroad between Augsburg and Munich in 1838–1840; Johann Jacob became well known in the money markets of central Europe; and Carl (1811–1889) achieved fame as a military advisor and social and political progressive.[29]

"Something of a Casanova," Joisten-Pruschke notes, "Carl moved to Vienna with his bride, the daughter of a wealthy banker. After a bad divorce—good only for the boulevard press—Carl returned to his father's house in Augsburg with his son and remained there until 1840."[30] In 1848, on orders from the king of Bavaria, Carl travelled to the United States to study its military operations. After returning to Germany, he made similar trips to Belgium, France, Poland, and Prussia before writing a special report that led to the reorganization of several military regiments in Bavaria.[31]

In addition to his military and diplomatic achievements, Carl established a number of progressive societies and organizations in Augsburg. A society for rehabilitating ex-convicts and a soup kitchen expanded on the work of his mother Nanette, who established a foundling hospital. As *parnas* of Augsburg's Jewish community for more than fifteen years, Carl played a major role in equipping the first synagogue in Bavaria with an organ.[32]

While Carl and his progeny remained in Europe, other members of the family looked to America as a place to start their lives anew. Carl's first cousin, Hermann Obermayer (1829–1897), is a case in point. The third child of a

Kriegshaber butcher, Hermann faced grim prospects at home. Getting married, domicile rights, work papers—everything was subject to approval from an unpredictable higher authority. Family folklore has it that Hermann was an early supporter of Carl Schurz and that his emigration may have been hastened by the Revolution of 1848.[33] In any event, under the sponsorship of an aunt, Henrietta Obermayer Guggenheimer, nineteen-year-old Hermann traveled from Bavaria to Lynchburg, Virginia, before becoming a clerk in a store owned by his uncle's brothers in Richmond. For twelve years, Hermann worked in that store, occupying a room in an upstairs hotel.

Fürth

Shabbat in front of Fürth synagogue, c. 1800
(Courtesy Obermayer family records)

As in Augsburg and Kriegshaber, Arthur traces his roots in Fürth back to the eighteenth century. The Holy Roman Empire at the time included more than 150 German-speaking fiefdoms and principalities. With the rise of princely power, the creation of free and independent imperial cities, and an increasingly powerful religious establishment, the emperor's authority had diminished considerably by 1756, when Arthur's ancestor Israel Lichtenstädter (1698–1789) arrived in Fürth with his family.

Jews are first mentioned as residing in Fürth in 1440, only to be banished at the end of the century in accordance with policies in other South German cities. Jews were expelled from Cologne in 1426, Augsburg in 1438, Erfurt in 1448, Nuremberg and Ulm in 1499, Regensburg in 1519, and Wuerzburg in 1565. By the dawn of the seventeenth century only Frankfurt, Worms, Prague, and Vienna supported large Jewish communities. By contrast, South German Jews resided mostly in farming communities like Creglingen and Archshofen, or near cities where Jews had been expelled, such as Kriegshaber (outside Augsburg) and Fürth (outside Nuremberg) where, as in a few other places, Jews had been allowed to return.[34] Depending on where in the city they lived, the Jews of Fürth fell under the jurisdiction of one of three magistrates—the bishop of Bamberg, the municipal council of Nuremberg, or the margrave of Ansbach. Expulsion thus might mean nothing more than moving across the street to the domain of a friendlier magistrate, as opposed to leaving an entire country with little more than the clothes on one's back.

Though the Jews of Fürth were denied citizenship rights and entry into most guilds, they benefited in other ways: Not only were they excused from military service, but they could not be forcibly baptized, nor could they fight in a duel with a Christian.

In the wake of the 1648 to 1649 Chmielnicki massacres, despite objections from the city of Nuremberg, Fürth became a haven for Polish Jews.[35] They were granted protection by the margrave of Ansbach, whose fiefdom, as you may recall, included Creglingen. In 1670 an influx of Jewish refugees from Vienna soon put Fürth on the map as a center of Jewish learning, with a Hebrew printing industry dating back to 1690 and in continuous operation until 1868. Over the years the Jews of Fürth felt increasingly at home. A municipal charter dated 1719 granted Jews a greater degree of autonomy than any other Jewish community in Germany, including the right to be tried in a Jewish court of law.[36]

In 1785 a traveler passing through Fürth observed that the Jews were "in every kind of trade, big and small, on the streets, in the open shops, and within buildings." Jews were well represented as buyers and sellers of locally manufactured goods, such as clocks, pocket watches (exported to Turkey), eyeglasses, and jewelry (on which they had a monopoly). Of the fourteen steam-driven engines in Fürth in the nineteenth century, seven were operated by Jewish manufacturers of everything from brewing machines and mirrors to furniture, toys, bronzing agents, and cotton thread.[37] By the time Israel Lichtenstädter and his family arrived in 1756, Fürth lay claim to a larger proportion of Jews than practically anywhere else in the Holy Roman Empire.[38]

At the time, homeless Jews overran Fürth's streets. Some 10 percent of the Jews in eighteenth-century Germany earned their living as itinerant merchants with no letters of protection, no fixed abode, and no means at their disposal to keep rapidly growing families from falling apart. In Franconia as a whole, to which Fürth belonged, more than a quarter of the Jewish population had no permanent address. Under the leadership of Arthur's forefather, Israel Lichtenstädter, the Jews of Fürth in 1763 organized the first Jewish orphan society in Germany. According to Fürth historian Gisela Blume:

> Lichtenstädter's dream was not only to give refuge to those who lived in the street and had to beg for their daily food. Certainly, Israel was not opposed to that. However, his idea was based on the Jewish injunction not to make a beggar feel like a beggar—not to shame someone, but to give the needy one an opportunity to do something good for the one who does him good, like receiving an education with which one can pray for the soul of a deceased benefactor. That was what guided Israel Lichtenstädter.[39]

In the true spirit of *tzedakah*, Israel devised the following plan for housing, feeding, clothing, and educating homeless boys:

> We feel particularly driven to do this because we see with amazement fatherless orphans, others driven from their father's table and now homeless, hungry and without any religious training whatsoever.… Poor boys, whatever their family situation, would be welcome as religious students from the ages of five to fifteen. They would get their food and clothing and would receive religious instruction in the five books of Moses, the Mishnah and Gemara. They would learn how to write in Hebrew beautifully, since it is good to connect other knowledge with the knowledge of one's religion.… We appeal to you to strengthen and support the weak and faltering, the abandoned youth wandering around on the street, and G-d will certainly repay you for working to bring about a virtue—proper religious instruction—that goes beyond the grave to the honor of the living.[40]

In the beginning, childless couples contributed a *freiplatz* (scholarship) to pay for whatever a boy needed. Initially, the boys were not housed in a separate building but lived and ate instead with families, joining their peers only for prayers and education. After a sponsor died, the boy would say kaddish for him or her. "Thus," notes Blume,

> he had the chance to say thank you to the person who enabled him to get an education, because saying kaddish for a person who has died is very, very important in Jewish life. It is believed that it helps the soul to go up to heaven. At a *leviah* (burial) which moved from the house to the cemetery, the orphans walked in front of the body which was covered in a *tallis* (prayer shawl) and white linen and often placed on a piece of wood. In olden times in Fürth, those who invited Jews who didn't have their own home for shabbes dinner were buried quite often on their table top which signified their good deeds. I am sure that is the way Israel Lichtenstädter was buried.[41]

In Fürth, generations of Israel's descendents lived out their lives as tradesmen in glass, cattle, baskets, and groceries. The marketplace where many of them conducted business had been a center of Jewish life for centuries. Israel Lichtenstädter's grandson Mosche Krakauer (1767–1816) was a familiar sight there. A retail grocer, Mosche had five children, all of whom were born and died in Fürth. The youngest, Nettie Krakauer Lehmann (1814–1875), was the wife of a glass faceter and cattle dealer and the mother of Veronika Lehmann (1851–1928), the future wife of Arthur's grandfather Hermann Obermayer. Veronika came to Philadelphia with her parents in the early 1870s.[42]

Coming to Terms with America

The large-scale migration of German Jews to America began soon after the defeat of Napoleon. Partly this was the result of young German Jews' frustration with the slow pace of emancipation; partly that transportation across the North Atlantic became more feasible after the Napoleonic Wars; and partly the attraction of economic opportunities in America, as early arrivals relayed

to their families back home. Some of Napoleon's "improvements," such as the abolition of ghettos, were kept in place; but restrictions, especially economic and professional ones, were restored after the Congress of Vienna. Moreover, having peaked in 1848, German liberalism by the 1850s was on the decline.

In contrast to such conditions, the idea of America as a land of unlimited freedom of opportunity and rights appealed all the more to Hermann Obermayer (1829–1897) of Kriegshaber and Joseph Sinsheimer (1869–1950) of Creglingen, as well as to their future wives, Veronika Lehmann of Fürth and Helmine Oberndoerfer (1869–1916) of Archshofen.

Like the vast majority of single male German Jews who came to America in the middle and latter part of the nineteenth century, Hermann Obermayer and Joseph Sinsheimer partook in the creation and expansion by German Jews of America's ready-made clothing and dry-goods industry.[43] Hermann became a Main Street/middle America merchant, and Joe became a Brooklyn corset manufacturer. Descended from generations of Creglingen cattle dealers, butchers, *schmoozers*, and soap manufacturers, Joe had mastered the essentials of business before leaving Creglingen—with little more than his father's consent—at sixteen. But one of thousands of German Jews who prospered in the *shmatte* (garment) trade, Joe started out as a bookkeeper and retired as treasurer of the second-largest corset manufacturer in America and, for years, a major employer of east European Jews.[44]

Just as Joe's rise to riches in the clothing industry struck a familiar chord in German Jewish circles of his day, so did Hermann Obermayer's movement from place to place. Hermann began his slow rise as a clerk in his uncle's dry-goods store in Virginia. After twelve years of clerking, Hermann enlisted in the Confederate army and fought at Antietam before being captured. He was released after signing an oath of allegiance to the United States.[45] After the war Hermann headed west to Mora, New Mexico, where he joined the firm of Lowenstein and Strauss, a grocery and dry-goods store run by German Jews from a family he knew in Kriegshaber. By then hundreds of German Jews had passed through Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Las Vegas, New Mexico, as well as scores of smaller settlements scattered throughout the American Southwest, bringing with them a credit economy outlawed under Catholic rule for centuries.[46]

Hermann spent twelve years in Mora before moving to Sciota, Illinois, where his brother Jacob had opened a dry-goods store eight years earlier. Here Hermann and Jacob enjoyed the esteemed status of Main Street merchants.

In 1878, on a trip to Philadelphia to replenish supplies, Hermann met his future wife, Veronika Lehmann, behind the counter of a store Hermann visited in the course of business. Hermann and Veronika were married at Congregation Adath Jeshurun, a German Jewish congregation established in Philadelphia in 1858. With a central aisle for weddings, Adath Jeshurun reminded Veronika of the synagogue her family attended in Fürth, where she had received a certificate

of confirmation from Rabbi Isaak Löwi in 1869, a few years before immigrating with her family to America. According to historian Blume, Rabbi Löwi

> attended the Yeshiva of Fürth where Meyer Rothschild's sons studied before receiving a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Munich. His head filled with modern ideas, in addition to moving the bimah to make room for a middle aisle like in a church, Rabbi Löwi also had an organ installed which was played on the Jewish Sabbath, much to the consternation of the Orthodox. Löwi wanted his inaugural speech printed in Hebrew; however, Jewish printers turned him down on the grounds that what he had to say was too radical for them to print, like advocating an end to the Chevra Kadisha, the society for the burial of the dead. "They are so old fashioned. Stop it. We don't need them," Löwi declared.[47]

Adath Jeshurun, which did not replace German with English at synagogue services until 1897, had provided Veronika and her family with a sense of continuity unknown in Sciota, the midwestern town to which Veronika moved after her marriage. Her sons Henry (1881–1964) and Leon (1886–1984) were born there. Like other immigrant German Jewish families who went west, opened stores, and raised children, the Obermayers were isolated from an organized Jewish community. As their boys grew older, the parents felt the need to move to a larger population center, where they could live in a Jewish community. That place was Philadelphia, to which the Obermayers moved to in the early 1890s and where, as members of Adath Jeshurun, their sons became bar mitzvahs and confirmands.

Like the vast majority of German Jews in America, Arthur's grandparents inculcated their children with a high regard for the rewards of learning. Joe Sinsheimer's daughter and Arthur's mother Julia (1900–1996) was an honor graduate of Julia Richman High School in New York City. (She went on to Columbia University, where she received a degree in microbiology before becoming a laboratory researcher at Mt. Sinai Hospital.) Arthur's paternal grandparents were no less committed to education. After Hermann died unexpectedly in 1897, Henry left school for work so Leon could go from Central High to the University of Pennsylvania, where he earned a law degree. After graduating he joined the prestigious firm of Mason and Edmunds, soon to become Edmunds and Obermayer.

Leon Obermayer shared with Rabbi Isaak Löwi of Fürth a strong commitment to Jewish philanthropy. In addition to establishing a vocational school to train Jews in Fürth to enter skilled crafts and trades newly opened to them, Rabbi Löwi helped Jews open small businesses by making interest-free loans available to them. Extending his services to gentiles as well as Jews in Philadelphia, Leon championed laws protecting women and children in custody and domestic relations cases. As president of Philadelphia's Board of Education during a time of

much racial tensions, Leon insisted that racial discrimination was wrong and that public education meant opportunity to all. In many ways, Leon continued a tradition started by Rabbi Löwi.[48]

In doing so, Leon played a major role in Jewish communal affairs, serving as president of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun and the American Jewish Historical Society and chairing the building campaign for a new Philadelphia YM/YWHA. Appointed to the board of Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), where he received an honorary doctor of Hebrew letters degree in 1954, Leon was a key figure in creating a branch of HUC-JIR in Jerusalem. With his wife Julia, he served on the board of the Albert Einstein Medical Center in Philadelphia and amassed a Judaica collection now on permanent exhibition at Congregation Rodeph Shalom in Philadelphia.

Julia and Leon met at a Jewish resort in Summit Springs, Maine, in the summer of 1921. Leon was thirty five; Julia twenty one. They were married two years later by a rabbi at the Plaza Hotel in New York City. Despite Prohibition, Joe Sinsheimer managed somehow to provide champagne for the occasion.

Julia and Leon's children—Herman (1924–), known as Obe, Helen Obermayer Sellers (1927–1995), and Arthur (1931–)—have made a concerted effort to live up to the educational and ethical standards of those who came before them, as have Obe's wife, the former Betty Ann Levy, who served as president of Congregation Rodef Shalom, the largest synagogue in Virginia; and Arthur's wife, the former Judith Hirschfeld, who earned a doctorate in mathematics from Harvard and has taught at Wellesley. Obe, a graduate of Dartmouth, enjoyed a successful career in journalism as a public advocate and ombudsman. In 1969, as publisher of Arlington's *Northern Virginia Sun*, Obe portrayed the My Lai massacre as "symptomatic of the way in which good intentions and worthwhile ends can falsely justify employing heinous means."[49] After selling the *Sun* in 1988, Obe joined the publication committee of *Commentary* Magazine, was the finance chair of the *Washington Journalism Review*, served on the national board of governors of the American Jewish Committee, and became a member of the national board of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs.

"What did I do and what impact did I have on others and the society in which I lived?" Arthur Obermayer asked in 1992.[50] A graduate of Swarthmore College, Arthur was awarded a doctorate in chemistry from MIT in 1956 and subsequently became president and principal shareholder of Moleculon Research Corporation, a developer of chemical, polymer, and pharmaceutical products and innovator of laboratory equipment for government and industry. As a supporter of a more just, equitable, and creative society,[51] Arthur supported Father Robert Drinan, a Jesuit priest, for Congress (he won five times) and drafted George McGovern's positions on science and technology-related issues during McGovern's campaign for the presidency.[52]

Exhibit pieces at Creglingen Jewish Museum. At top is the 1769 wimpel (personalized Torah binder) of Raphael Blumenfeld which was made from his brit milah swaddling clothes and then used to bind the Torah at his bar mitzvah.
(Courtesy Arthur Obermayer)

After selling Moleculon, Arthur encouraged the emergence of private enterprise in Russia by producing programs for Russian television, explaining the workings of free enterprise and market economics. Writes Michael Feldberg:

> In 1990, Arthur became a board member of The New Israel Fund to support grassroots activities advancing democratic and pluralistic values in Israel. Arthur [also] created the Obermayer Foundation which, in conjunction with the Berlin Parliament, presents annual awards to individual Germans who have made major contributions to the preservation of the history of Germany's Jewish communities. In addition, Arthur established a Jewish Museum in Creglingen to memorialize the lives of the Jews who lived there by remembering local events that shaped their lives. In appreciation for his activities in 2007 the Federal Republic of Germany awarded Arthur the Bundesverdienstkreuz (Federal Order of Merit), the nation's highest award.[53]

Like Leon and Julia and so many of their parents' generation, Obe and Arthur have responded to American emancipation by leading exemplary lives in which being Jewish, making a living, serving the public, and a commitment to Jewish communal affairs and philanthropy reinforce each other to the point of being inexorably intertwined.

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Notes

[1]"Our Crowd," a self-referential term used by New York's German Jewish elite in the early twentieth century, was popularized by Stephen Birmingham's anecdotal history of the same name, published in 1967.

[2]As a longtime admirer of Naomi W. Cohen's work, especially about German Jews in America, it is a great privilege to have been asked to teach the innovative course in American Jewish history that she introduced at Hunter College and to have been invited to contribute to this special issue in her honor—an honor she so richly deserves.

[3]The Obermayer family archive, currently kept in Arthur Obermayer's home in West Newton, Massachusetts, includes the findings of four dedicated German regional historians—Claudia Heuwinkel, who combed through three centuries of municipal, regional, and congregational documentation to produce a detailed record of the activities of Arthur's Creglingen and Archshofen forebears; Gisela Blume, a walking encyclopedia of Fürth's Jewish past, especially with regard to Obermayer patriarch Israel Lichtenstädter; Franz Josef Merkl, a military historian with an intimate knowledge of the Obermayer family; and Anke Joisten-Pruschke, whose familiarity with municipal, judicial, and church records in Stuttgart, Augsburg, and Kriegshaber proved invaluable in piecing together the history of Arthur's family. I met and talked at length with all four in Germany and am deeply indebted to them for what they told me. Special thanks also to Uwe Krieg of Berlin for his meticulous reading of the text.

[4]The rights of Arthur's South German ancestors were predicated on letters of protection issued by the emperor, a prince of the church, a local magistrate, or a delegate thereof. To legitimize the practice, Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa (1152–1190) in 1179 declared Jews in South Germany a part of his "imperial fisc" and as such, under his protection. In 1236, Emperor Friedrich II issued an order granting Jews in the empire "protection on country roads and lanes, freedom of movement of residence, and exemption from special financial duties to rulers and towns," thus establishing an important precedent. Nachum T. Gidal, *Jews in Germany from Roman Times to the Weimar Republic* (Cologne: Konemann Verlaggeschellschaft, 1998), 46.

The Holy Roman Emperor, being relatively tolerant of Jews in an otherwise hostile Christian environment, came to enjoy near-absolute power over them: "You are ours in body and possession," Louis IV (known as Louis the Bavarian), Holy Roman Emperor from 1328 to 1347, said to a group of Jewish moneylenders defrauded on their property claims: "We may make, do and deal with you as it pleases us." R. von Stillfried and T. Marcker, eds., *Monumenta Zolleriana* 3 (Berlin, 1857), 10.

German bishops eager to develop the economies of the domains under their authority might also issue letters of protection. So it was in 1084 when Bishop Rüdiger, governor of Speyer, granted Jews "full permission to change gold and silver, to buy and sell anything they pleased." To protect them from "the insolence of the populace," Bishop Rüdiger provided Jews with housing "outside the community and habitation of other citizens." Bishop Rüdiger's edict was affirmed by Holy Roman Emperor Heinrich IV in 1090. Alfred Hilgard, *Urkunden Zur Geschichte der Stadt Speyer* (Strasburg, 1885), 11–12.

[5]Obermayer family archive.

[6]Interview with Gisela Blume, 13 July 2002.

[7]Gordon A. Craig, *The Germans* (New York: Meridian, 1991), 126.

[8]I owe special thanks to Bob Seltzer for his enormously helpful responses to this paper in its various manifestations.

[9]George the Pious was the first of his line to grant a Jew, Joseph of Bibern, and his family the right to live in Creglingen as buyers and sellers of goods for an annual fee of three gulden. Werner J. Heymann, *Kleeblatt und Davidstern* (Emskirchen: Verlag Maria Muemmler, 1990), 3ff.

[10]Obermayer family archive.

[11]In 1616, two years before Simson of Reinsbronn's arrival, Margrave Joachim Ernest issued his first letter of protection to a Jew.

[12]In 1609, Simon Marius (born Mayr) discovered the moons of Jupiter from a makeshift observatory in an Ansbach castle tower. A century later Princess Caroline, the future Queen of England, met with Leibniz in the same castle while he was formulating his ideas on Newton in the famous Leibniz-Clarke correspondence.

[13]See Guenther Schumann, *Die Markgrafen von Brandenburg-Ansbach* (Ansbach: Historischer Verein fur Mittelfranken, 1980).

[14]Obermayer family archive.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Hirsch Jacob did not suffer alone. A cousin, Abraham Lazar, had no easy time with his daughter, Michla. Since 1797, Michla suffered attacks of "malice and nymphomania… and hit her parents and her sister, and insulted the neighbors to such an extent that she had to be locked up in a small room in Badgasse 3." Interview with Claudia Heuwinkel, 8 June 2004.

[20]Obermayer family archive.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Interview with Claudia Heuwinkel, 8 June 2004.

[23]Michael A. Meyer, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times, Vol. 2: Emancipation and Acculturation, 1760–1871* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 71.

[24]Interview with Franz Josef Merkl, 20 July 2002.

[25]"Today, people are sensitive to exact spellings of names, but there was a great deal of variation in the spelling of my ancestors' names. This was so because many people were illiterate, Jewish records in Hebrew were converted phonetically into German, and standardized spelling in German was not yet prevalent. Thus, Obermayer could also be spelled Obermeyer, Obermyer, Obermaier, Obermair or Obermayr. My great-great-grandfather, Isaac Obermayer, and other Isaacs who preceded him, had their names spelled Isak, Isaak, Isaac, Eysig, Hitzig, and Yitsig." Interview with Arthur Obermayer, 24 August 2003.

[26]Interview with Anke Joiston-Pruschke, 20 July 2002.

[27]Raphael Straus, *Regensburg and Augsburg* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1939), 230 ff.

[28]Interview with Anke Joiston-Pruschke, 20 July 2002.

[29]Obermayer family archive.

[30]"Because the number of Jewish households in Augsburg was a fixed figure, Carl had to wait, like anyone else, for another family to move away, die out or convert before he could establish a domicile of his own." Interview with Anke Joisten-Pruschke, 20 July 2002.

[31]"A colonel in the army, Carl attained the highest military rank of any Jew in Germany. Given the title 'von Obermayer' for diplomatic service to the Bavarian government, Carl was knighted by the king of Württemberg in 1869, only because the king of Bavaria refused to on account of

Carl's scandalous personal life. Carl received as many as ten special medals from the Ottoman Empire in addition to the highest Prussian award presented to a non-Prussian. He wrote three books about the military and served for many years as American consul in Augsburg." Interview with Franz Josef Merkl, 20 July 2002.

[32]"Carl's family married into other prominent families, both Jewish and gentile. One sister, Henriette, married Simon von Oppenheim, head of the Cologne banking firm of that name. Another sister, Emilie, married Heinrich Flersheim, a Frankfurt banker. A daughter, Emilie, married Baron Stefan Kevotschev, Constantinople's Austro-Hungarian consul; another daughter, Henriette, married Baron Louis Gustave Dreyfus, an art collector after whom a room in the Louvre is named; a third daughter married Count Hierschel-Minerbi, a title conferred on him by Pope Pius IX." Interview with Franz Josef Merkl, 20 July 2002.

[33]For the life of Carl Schurz and the failure of liberal revolutions in midcentury Germany, see Hans L. Trefousse, *Carl Schurz: A Biography* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1982).

[34]Marvin Lowenthal, *The Jews of Germany: A Story of Sixteen Centuries* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1936), 136.

[35]Michael A. Meyer, ed., *German-Jewish History in Modern Times, Volume 1: Tradition and Enlightenment, 1600–1780* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 98.

[36]Interview with Gisela Blume, 13 July 2002. Fluent in Hebrew, a convert to Judaism, and the source of much invaluable information on the Jews of Fürth, Blume has spent the better part of her life documenting and preserving their history.

[37]See Hugo Barbeck, *Geschichte der Juden in Nuremberg and Fürth* (Nuremberg: Friedrich Heerdegen, 1878).

[38]"Prague in 1800, with 8,500 or 10.6 percent of the city's total population, housed the largest Jewish community in German-speaking Europe numerically but not proportionately. Next came Hamburg with 6,300 Jews constituting 6 percent of the population, Berlin with 3,300 or 2 percent, and Frankfurt, with 3,000 or 7.5 percent. Fürth's 2,400 Jews by contrast made up 15 percent of Fürth's population which rose to 17.6 percent or 3,000 Jews in 1848. Even as late as 1935, 50 percent of the wholesalers, 14.5 percent of the retailers and 23.1 percent of the manufacturers in Fürth were Jewish." Interview with Gisela Blume, 13 July, 2002.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Obermayer family archive.

[41]Interview with Gisela Blume, 13 July 2002.

[42]"During the Hitler period, Fürth was no better than any other Franconian city. During the so-called 'Kristallnacht' the entire Schulhof complex was burned down. Jewish shops along Schwabacher Strasse were destroyed and looted. SA-men broke into the Jewish hospital. Jews were forced together in the main place of the city. The men were taken to the Berlotzheimer Library, established by a Jewish philanthropist. There they were tortured. Their beards were cut off. One person was killed, one committed suicide.

"On November 29, 1941, the first deportation of Jews from Fürth took place. Their destination along with others from Franconia was the death camps of Latvia. Among the deportees of March 24, 1942 to Izbica in Poland were the Jewish orphans from the building on Julienstrasse. The head of the orphanage Dr. Ismar Hallemann (after whom Julienstrasse was renamed) and his wife Clara voluntarily accompanied their charges to this place of no return. The last rabbi of Fürth, Dr. Siegfried Behrens, also fell victim to this transport. In the Shoah at least 886 Jews from Fürth were killed. After the liberation 40 survivors returned. Today the synagogue within the orphanage building is home to the only active congregation in Fürth." Interview with Gisela Blume, 13 July 2002.

[43]For the role of German-Jewish merchants as agents of commercial progress in nineteenth century America, see Hasia R. Diner, *A Time For Gathering: The Second Migration 1820–1880* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[44]Joe was also an officer and trustee of New York's West End Synagogue, as well as treasurer for many years of the King Solomon Masonic Lodge No. 279. Not much is known about the life of Joe's wife Helmina Oberndoerfer (1869–1916) other than that she was born in Archshofen to Samuel and Bertha Oppenheimer Oberndoerfer and at sixteen, to avoid an arranged marriage, left for New York to live with a relative before moving into a Jewish-run boardinghouse. In 1893 Helmina and Joe married. (Helmina may have known Joe before she came to New York as there were a number of inter-family connections.) After eight miscarriages and the death of a two-year-old, Julia was born in 1900.

[45]Kenneth Libo and Michael Feldberg, *The Obermayers: A History of a Jewish Family in Germany and America* (Newton, MA: Obermayer Foundation, Inc., 2009), 66–67.

[46]See William J. Parish, *The Charles Ilfeld Company: The Study of the Rise and Decline of Mercantile Capitalism in New Mexico* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961).

[47]"Dr Löwi met regularly with a Protestant minister and a Catholic priest to discuss what was important for the city from each of their points of view. They were very close to each other, very friendly. So one day the priest said, 'Oh, Dr. Löwi, you are such a wonderful man, such a modern man. And you understand so much, only you still keep kosher. I wonder when you will finally eat pork as we do.' 'I'll tell you, my friend,' Dr. Löwi answered. 'The day of your marriage.'" Interview with Gisela Blume, 13 July 2002.

[48]Libo and Feldberg, 97–98.

[49]Ibid., 117.

[50]Ibid., 123.

[51]Ibid., 127–128.

[52]Ibid., 129.

[53]Ibid., 136.

Life in the United States 1878–1881, According to *Ha-Zefirah*

Robert M. Seltzer

הצפירה

HAZEFIRAH.

מכתב עתי משמיע חדשות

בקרב עם ישרון, מכל הדברים הנוגעים בעניני המדינות,

דברי חכמה ומדע, ידיעות העולם והטבע.

חיים זעליג סלאנימסקי.

N: 10. | Варшава, 2 (14) Марта 1881. | שנה שמינית

אבל־עם

תוכן הענינים

דברי הימים

Cover page of Ha-Zefirah*, 2 March (14 New Style) 1881*
(Courtesy Klau Library)

By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Jewish journalism was well on the way to being an indispensible medium for connecting Jews locally, nationally, and internationally. Papers in Hebrew and Yiddish, as well as in vernacular languages and Ladino, informed readers about unprecedented opportunities and dangers for the Jewish people throughout the diaspora, and they did so against a background of contemporary affairs and in the new vocabulary and discourse of modernized forms of Jewish identity.[1] Among the most prominent of these periodicals was *Ha-Zefirah* of Warsaw.[2]

Chaim Zelig Slonimsky founded *Ha-Zefirah* in 1862 in Warsaw as a Hebrew weekly in the spirit of the moderate Haskalah. In 1886 it became a daily under the editorship of Nahum Sokolow, who enlarged its coverage significantly. It gradually became one of the main Hebrew newspapers in Russia, and writings by numerous distinguished authors appeared in it. After initial hesitation, Sokolow turned it into an eloquent voice for the early Hibbat Zion (Love of Zion) movement and, later, modern Zionism. It was closed down by the Russian government in 1906, revived in 1910, suspended during World War I, and published off-and-on in Poland between1917 and 1931.[3]

We will examine its coverage of the United States for four years—1878 through 1881—as America began to loom prominently in the awareness of East European Jewry. *Ha-Zefirah* projected an attractive, dynamic, and intriguing picture of the New World at a time when German Jewish trans-Atlantic migration had passed its zenith and mass emigration from East European lands was just getting underway. The pull and push behind the Jewish exodus from Russia were symptoms of the onset of a critical shift in Jewish social geography. *Ha-Zefirah* conveyed both vectors—and contributed to them.

To be sure, transmitting information about the United States was a tangential aspect of *Ha-Zefirah*'s mission. *Ha-Zefirah* was intended to be an up-to-date European journal conveying modern scientific and technological information to an audience of largely traditional religiosity. Its content was rather eclectic; a halakhic discussion in Rashi script might be followed by geometrical puzzles, portraits of notable Jewish personages, and reports on political affairs. An example of the last: The Russo-Turkish war was drawing to a close at the beginning of 1878; issues of the paper that year contained articles on the Congress of Berlin in which the European powers decided how to resolve the "Eastern [i.e., Balkan] Question." The diplomats agreed to recognize the independence of Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania from Ottoman rule. In this connection, guarantees of Jewish rights in Romania were of concern to the editors of *Ha-Zefirah* because of that government's refusal to carry out previous promises regarding its Jews.

The paper also noted various international crises in Afghanistan and North Africa and surveyed the political situation in major European capitals. In 1879, the emergence of openly anti-Jewish sentiments among educated circles in Germany captured *Ha-Zefirah*'s attention. The writers commented on essays by Heinrich von Treitschke, the hyper-nationalist historian of the newly unified Reich, that were blatantly critical of the Jews; and on demagogic speeches of Adolph Stöcker, the notorious Protestant chaplain of the kaiser.

Inasmuch as Warsaw and the Polish areas around it were part of the tsarist empire, Russian affairs were of paramount concern. After several unsuccessful attempts had been made on the life of Alexander II in 1880, he was assassinated in 1881 by a group from Narodnaya Volya (the People's Will), the extremist branch of the revolutionary underground. The consequences were a turning point in Russian Jewish (and Russian) history. Ascending to power after the Crimean War, Alexander II had gradually introduced a series of "Great Reforms" (e.g., the emancipation of the serfs, some local self-government, and a drastically shortened military service). Consideration of capping them with something like a Russian parliament was scotched by his successor, Alexander III.

On the whole, Russian Jews had viewed Alexander II favorably, because the limited relaxation of Jewish residence restrictions included in the Great Reforms were hopefully seen as foreshadowing their eventual emancipation

(such as had finally been achieved in Germany after decades of struggle). In the late 1870s, hopeful of the broader integration of Russian and Polish Jews into civil society, *Ha-Zefirah* expressed devotion to the Russian government and to the tsar. (Indeed, it had to, to escape censorship.) The paper mourned the tsar's death with a black-bordered front page and castigated the assassins.

The Narodnaya Volya included Gesya Gelfman, a young woman from a Jewish family, which enabled antisemites to blame the murder on "the Jews." As Alexander III ascended the throne, pogroms broke out mainly in the Ukrainian region and a few in the north. (For many years, Russian Jewish historians following in the footsteps of Simon Dubnow held government officials responsible for instigating the pogroms, but recent studies tend to interpret the outbursts as spontaneous attacks symptomatic of social dislocation in a rapidly changing Russian economy.[4]) Throughout the late spring and summer of 1881, "storms in the south"—code for the pogroms—dominated the pages of *Ha-Zefirah*. In the fall Alexander III appointed committees "to study the Jewish question." Despite forlorn hopes that the government's investigatory committees would support greater rights for Jews in the Russian Empire, the editors sensed dark times ahead. The "temporary May Laws" issued in 1882 imposed severe educational quotas on Russian Jewish youth, who were beginning to apply to the universities in large numbers, and drastically limited residence rights even within the Pale of Settlement. A notable change in the climate of Jewish opinion ensued, as evidenced by the surging popularity among the *maskilim* (proponents of the Jewish Enlightenment) of Jewish cultural nationalism in the form of the nascent Hibbat Zion movement.

Until then, *Ha-Zefirah*'s cultural program was that of the moderate Russian Haskalah: rationalistic but not at all antireligious. The paper advocated a modern education for Jews in the Western mode, such as widespread dissemination of scientific, geographical, and historical knowledge. This secular orientation led the editors to include extensive articles on recent inventions and discoveries, accounts by travelers on their experiences of distant lands, and depictions of natural wonders. To a great extent these were general in content (that is, not particularly oriented toward Jewish matters); many were probably translated from European journals. However, as report after report of arson, looting, and murder in the Jewish communities of the southwest of the Russian Empire came in during 1881, the entertaining features and the optimistic, curious, eclectic spirit were eclipsed by an intense preoccupation with these ominous events.

The material about America culled from the pages of *Ha-Zefirah* and summarized here reflect three overlapping perspectives: what the journal's correspondents in America chose to report, what the editors in Warsaw may have asked them to relate and then chose to print, and what the readers possibly gleaned. In the issues this essay covers, references to America were found in news articles and editorials, telegraphic reports, items culled from the European press,

personal advertisements, occasional letters from readers, and a few substantial articles on developments in this relatively new area of the diaspora. The details conveyed are less important than the overall image of the vitality of American life and the opportunities it offered Jews.

Among the American correspondents were three who wrote feature stories: Abraham Abba Rakovsky, Mr. Widwar of Indiana, and the most prominent, Judah David Eisenstein of New York.[5]

Coming across in the pages of *Ha-Zefirah* is a picture of the United States as a land of clever inventiveness as well as economic dynamism and natural beauty. *Ha-Zefirah* reported the invention of a "wireless telegraph," a hearing aid, a "topophone" for collecting sounds at a distance,[6] the electric light, a railroad train powered by sails, an electric shock punishment for criminals, central heating for a whole city, a technique for manufacturing woodlike material from pressed straw, water-proof cloth for a floating lifejacket, new kinds of butter churns, sewing machines, fly swatters, printing presses, and an alarm clock operated from the local telegraph office for workers and hotel guests.[7] An American printer suggests books with green rather than black ink as easier on the eyes. A New Jersey man uses incubators to raise a thousand chickens daily (he claimed to have sold 250,000 a year in New York). An entire hotel was moved several yards back from the road without disturbing the guests; a newspaper was published on a Mississippi riverboat. An adventurous American made stilts on which he was said to have crossed the English Channel in eight hours.[8] The paper reprinted articles on a "city" built in three days and a sunken ship located by magnets.[9] The correspondents reported admiringly on awards to Thomas A. Edison.[10] *Ha-Zefirah* was not unappreciative of entrepreneurship, either: Eisenstein reported on a doctor who fasted for forty days, making a nice profit from selling tickets of admittance, photographs, and testimonials.[11]

As for natural marvels, we read of the discovery of huge cave systems in Virginia and Kentucky and a petrified forest in Wyoming. There are descriptions of the giant sequoias of California, the freezing of Niagara Falls, eclipses and comets, devastating storms and heat waves, a sinking town in Nevada.[12] A canal is proposed between the Pacific Ocean and Death Valley.[13] On a considerably smaller scale are a bottle of "singing sands" and a baby girl with a tail.[14] Readers are informed of America's wonderfully fruitful soil, enormous harvests, fabulously successful businessmen—but also of yellow fever in the South (and efforts by northern Jews to rescue their coreligionists).[15]

A series of articles by Rakovsky commenced at the harbor of New York City and moved to the city's suburbs after which Rakovsky took a boat up the Erie Canal to upper New York State, travelled south to Philadelphia, east to the coastal towns of New Jersey, and then onward to the West. In Leadville, Colorado, the readers heard that, amid wild parties and duels, Mexican, European, Negro, and Indian prospectors lived together, ruled only by their

passion for gold. Eggs in Leadville cost fifty cents each. Rakovsky then promised readers descriptions of the Pacific Coast, but he abruptly disappeared from the pages of the paper without delivering on that promise.[16]

Quite in contrast with the detailed treatment of European affairs are the fragmentary accounts of political and social developments in the United States during these years. We learn of wars with the Indians and attempts to civilize them, of Chinese immigration and attempts to curb it.[17] After the election and subsequent shooting of President James A. Garfield in 1881 we follow his prolonged, unsuccessful attempt to recover.[18] As East European Jewish immigration to America picked up, Eisenstein offered a series intended for the prospective newcomer.[19] While reporting on general American matters that abut Jewish interests, he occasionally calls attention to current events such as a disagreement between the United States and England over fishing rights off the coast of Newfoundland, the cool reception ex-President Grant received in Ireland because of his "no popery" stand, and a speech by President Rutherford B. Hayes predicting a reduced national debt and a business boom, despite (Eisenstein notes) a decline in workingmen's wages during the preceding years.[20]

Ha-Zefirah provides limited information on the distinctive branch of the Jewish people taking shape in America by writing about meetings, lectures, and balls; the establishment of new organizations and institutions; and fundraising for hospitals, nurseries, schools, Hebrew societies, YMHAs, orphanages, old folks' homes, and overseas relief for Jews and non-Jews.[21] Eisenstein calls attention to New York cultural events of interest to Jews, such as a play about a Jewish merchant and a performance by "the divine" French actress Sarah Bernhardt.[22]

It must have been clear to some of the readers of *Ha-Zefirah* that this was to be a voluntary Jewish community different from the Old World pattern—especially the Jewry of East Europe—with respect to its political status, social involvement, and religiosity. American Jews were said to be gratified by their reception in American public life. Articles report the pride engendered by the election of Jews to public office and the appointment of a few Jews to the bench and even the diplomatic corps.[23] Non-Jewish officials praise the progress made by Jews in the United States and express concern about the welfare of Jews in other countries, such as Romania and Morocco.[24] The governor of Pennsylvania apologizes for an overly blatant Christian Thanksgiving Day proclamation.[25] Christian ministers criticize German antisemitic accusations.[26] On the other hand, there were reports signaling an upsurge of discrimination against Jews in hotels and resorts[27]—and of some American Jews criticizing their backward East European brethren.[28]

The new American Judaism makes an appearance from time to time in pieces by Eisenstein and Widwar, who were bemused by changes being introduced into synagogues. Unmoved by the rhetoric of Reform rabbis, they were

mystified why American Jews wanted revised prayer books and modifications in Shabbat practice.[29] Eisenstein dismisses Felix Adler's Ethical Culture together with various, to him, outré religious positions.[30] By contrast, signs of Orthodox vitality are commended: Talmud classes, a *Shomrei Shabbat* Society, a proposal to import a chief rabbi for New York.[31] Referring caustically to a B'nai B'rith group that accepted uncircumcised men, Eisenstein calls them "*B'nai Brith* without a *brith*." He notes that a Purim Ball was postponed in Houston until after Passover because of Lent: "Why not because of the *sefirah*?"[32] Nevertheless, the meetings of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, still positioning itself as a broad-based organization, are described in some detail and rather appreciatively.[33]

Ha-Zefirah's editorial policy, derived from the Haskalah, approved of Jewish agriculturalism, favoring Jewish settlements in Palestine such as those envisioned by the Hibbat Zion (decades later the paper would champion Zionism). A hot issue was whether Jews should be encouraged to create their own settlements in America. Most reports, with the notable exception of Eisenstein's, anticipated a flood of sturdy Jewish pioneers tilling the American prairie in agricultural villages to be established for them.[34]

An (apocryphal?) anecdote from Prairie Township, Pennsylvania, sounds a humorous note. A certain Mr. Guttman visited the home of a rich property owner, reporting that he had dreamed of a treasure buried under a certain tree. Behold, exactly at that place they found $50,000 in gold. As they were about to part, Guttman asked for cash because his share of the gold was too heavy for his backpack, and the property owner obliged. The gold, however, turned out to be false; "[H]is whereabouts are not known." An old confidence game.[35]

In contrast, among advertisements of booksellers and *etrog* importers are sad notices asking for the addresses of lost brothers and fathers and *agunot* (deserted wives) pleading for information from husbands who, years earlier, had departed alone for America.[36] In 1880, a plea was published supposedly from a wife left behind in Europe by a certain Mr. Slotsky in Altoona, Pennsylvania. The editor of *Ha-Zefirah*, together with Eisenstein, the B'nai B'rith lodge in Altoona, and the synagogue, all rose up in defense of Slotsky, whose name was cleared. Henceforth the signature of a rabbi was to be required in every letter of this kind.[37]

In 1879 an advertisement in Yiddish (not Hebrew) appeared on the last page of about half of the issues of the paper: "North German Lloyd—Cheap and Comfortable Steamship Accommodations—from Bremen to America."[38] After the pogroms of 1881, which began in southern Russia and spread north and west in the fall, the spectacle of tens, hundreds, and then thousands of Jews fleeing to the New World takes center stage in the journal.[39]

Here is a report from *Ha-Zefirah* 12 May 1881 (Western style, 24 May) [40]:

> On the 1st (13th) of May there broke out a disturbance in Alexandrovsk, Yekaterinoslav Province. Workers on the railroad fell upon the Jews, plundered them, and smote them greatly. They were assisted by local peasants. Eight hours the upheaval ensued, until after midnight the army arrived and put down the disturbance.
>
> On the 2nd of May disturbances broke out in Lozova and Nikolaev. In both these places the plunderers did not do much evil because armed forces came in time and restored order. Not so was it in the city of Smiela in the Province of Kiev.… On the day of disturbances near the railway line in Zmerinsk the Jews' lives were at stake. In the city of Konotop all the houses and shops near the railway line were destroyed. On the 7th (19th) of May came a report from Simferopol that the fire became inflamed also in the towns of the Crimea. In Berdyansk and Orekhov the disturbances broke out in a terrible manner and the [government] minister of the district hastened there at the head of an army battalion. The end of the matter is still not known. The inhabitants of the villages abandoned their homes and gathered in the towns and cities of Kremenchug, Poltava, and Yekaterinoslav, which became besieged.
>
> In the rural towns in Kherson Province, German and Bulgarian colonists awoke and chose armed men to guard our brethren of the House of Israel in their places. In Warsaw the last ten days passed quietly and safely; there are no outbreaks in the streets of Warsaw.[41]

Brody was a key railroad junction in Austrian Galicia, an important gateway between southern Russia and Austria-Hungary. There, thousands of cold, hungry, and destitute Jews jammed the streets outside the house of the agent of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. The agent rushed back and forth from Brody to Paris, trying to send groups to the United States, sustain refugees with shelter, bread, and tea, and warn off the thousands more he heard were preparing to come.[42] In the fall and winter of 1881, *Ha-Zefirah* contained news about boatloads of Jews bound for European ports. The great East European Jewish immigration to America was under way. American Jewish reception committees and funds were mobilized—and overwhelmed.

For Russian Jewish readers of *Ha-Zefirah* at the beginning of 1878, America was a marvelous land far across the Atlantic Ocean. Still in 1881 there were *maskilim* who hoped that Alexander III would free them of civil disabilities. But the train station of Brody, packed with desperate Jews, was a sign of growing disillusion on all levels of Jewish society. In New York harbor, kindly committees waited to receive the "small, selected, well-trained handfuls of Eastern European Jewish farmers-to-be." Between 1881 and 1914, for about two million East European Jews, that distant land of curious wonders and intriguing opportunities would become their home.

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Notes

[1]This paper is based on research done for Jacob Rader Marcus almost a half century ago. I am grateful for the staff of the American Jewish Archives for locating my paper in Dr. Marcus's files. There are other such (unpublished) papers in the American Jewish Archives written under the auspices of Dr. Marcus. Using this material is, I feel, doubly appropriate because Naomi W. Cohen frequently assigned her students to write research papers on similar runs of issues in a Jewish periodical.

Journalism plays an increasingly important role in modern history, especially in Jewish history: "The circuits of information upon which human societies are constructed came more and more to rely upon this simple, mechanically produced article which, once it existed, became inseparable from the business of government and economics. The newspaper depends upon its own special lines of communication, inward and outward, bringing information to it and taking the printed copies to its reader." Anthony Smith, *The Newspaper: An International History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 15. Around the year 1880 the importance of newspapers took a great leap forward, ushering in a "golden age of journalism" with tremendous implications for public opinion. Ibid., 143. The importance of the new Jewish press is mentioned in Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881*, trans. Chaya Naor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 107–111. Important is Bartal's Hebrew article, "Heavenly America: the USA as an Ideal Model for Nineteenth-Century East European Jews," in *Following Columbus: America, 1492–1992*, ed. Miriam Eliav-Felton (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 1996), 511–522.

On the Jewish dimensions of this subject see the suggestive essay by Oren Soffer, "Paper Territory: Early Hebrew Journalism and Its Political Roles," *Journalism History* (Spring 2004): 31–39; Soffer, "The Case of the Hebrew Press: From the Traditional Model of Discourse to the Modern Model," *Written Communication* 21, no. 2 (April 2004): 141–170, especially 156–16l and n. 13; and Soffer, "Anti-Semitism, Statistics, and Scientization of Hebrew Political Discourse: The Case Study of *Ha-Tzefirah*," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, and Society* 10 (Winter 2004): 55–79.

[2]Usually translated "The Dawn," a favorite name for Jewish periodicals of this period, *Ha-Zefirah* might more aptly be rendered "The Clarion." Slonimsky founded it to convey to religious Jews scientific knowledge and news about recent inventions. Some of the most important *maskilim* wrote for the paper in its early years. When Slonimsky briefly became head of the Zhitomir rabbinic school in 1874–1875, the paper suspended publication for six months; it was issued for a short time in Berlin, until Slonimsky received permission to publish it again in Warsaw beginning in September 1875. Incidentally, the philosopher Henry Slonimsky, dean of the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in New York, was Slonimsky's grandson. Yehuda Slutsky, "Slonimski, Hayyim Selig" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, 18, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 679.

On the paper, see Getzel Kressel, "Ha-Zefirah," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 8, 495; Avner Holtzman, "Ha-Tsefirah" in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* 2, ed. Gershon David Hundert (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1909–1910. Also "Newspapers and Periodicals," in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2, 1264–1265.

There is a growing scholarly literature on the nineteenth-century Hebrew press. See Soffer's articles listed above in n. 1. Also Soffer, *There is No Place for Pilpul! Hazefirah Journal and the Modernization of Sociopolitical Discourse* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik Press, 2007); and his "'Hazefirah' Journal: The Modernization of the Political–Social Discourse in the Hebrew Language," doctoral dissertation (The Hebrew University, 2002).

Mainly on its later iteration: Eizik Remba, "The Hebrew Press in Poland between Two World Wars," in *The Jewish Press that Was: Accounts, Evaluations, and Memories of Jewish Papers in pre-Holocaust Europe*, ed. Aryeh Bar (Tel Aviv: World Federation of Jewish Journalists, 1980), 153–157.

[3]My friend Abba Tor recalls that in 1931 his father brought with him from Poland to Palestine bound volumes of *Ha-Zefirah*.

[4]Michael Stanislawski, "Russia," in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* 1, 1610.

[5]The three main American correspondents were the following: Mr. Widwar of Evanston, Indiana, where the first Jewish family had settled in 1837 (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1st edition, 8 [New York: Macmillan, 1972], 1361); Widwar may have been Rabbi Henry Vidaver, who immigrated to the United States in 1868. He was a noted Hebraist and served as rabbi in Philadelphia and New York. Or Widwar may have been his brother Rabbi Falk Vidaver, who served as a rabbi in San Francisco and New York (Falk Vidaver's obituary in *The New York Times* on 6 October 1909 reported that "he ranked among the Hebraic scholars of the age"). Abraham Abba Rakovsky may have been the Hebrew writer A.A. Rakovsky, who translated several books into Hebrew, including Benjamin Disraeli's novel, *The Wondrous Tale of David Alroy* (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1st edition, 5, 432). The third was the best known. Judah David Eisenstein (1854–1956) immigrated to the United States in 1872 and became a successful businessman and a prolific Hebrew author and anthologizer. See the article on him by Abraham Meir Haberman in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, 6, 273. Eisenstein was the grandfather of Ira Eisenstein, the son-in-law of Mordecai M. Kaplan and the first president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Kaplan mentions Eisenstein in his diaries: *Communings of the Spirit: The Journals of Mordecai M. Kaplan, Volume 1, 1914–1934*, ed. Mel Scult (Detroit: Wayne State University Press and The Reconstructionist Press, 2001), 422, 453. Kaplan emphasizes Eisenstein's Orthodoxy. See also Ira Eisenstein, *Reconstructing Judaism: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Reconstructionist Press, 1986) and Lloyd P. Gartner, "From New York to Miedzyrecz: Immigrant Letters to Judah David Eisenstein, 1878–1886," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 52 (1962–1963): 234–243.

[6]The topophone was "a double ear-trumpet for estimating the direction from which sounds proceed, especially for the use of navigation." *Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition Unabridged* (Springfield, MA: C. and G. Merriam, Co., 1949), 2670.

[7]Invention of the telephone and a new printing press: *Ha-Zefirah* 5, no. 7 (1878): 55 (future references in *Ha-Zefirah* will follow this model, although abbreviated); 5, no. 8 (1878): 63. A train powered by sail: 5, no. 32 (1878): 255. The electric light: 5, no. 45 (1878): 356. Shocked criminals: 5, no. 51 (1878): 407. For *Ha-Zefirah*'s reporters (as for every other generation) the future was not predicable: Heating an entire city: 6, no. 3 (1879): 23; 6, no. 5 (1879): 35. A wireless telegraph: 6, no. 22 (1879):175. Hearing aids: 6, no. 47 (1879): 375. The aforementioned topophone: 7, no. 18 (1880): 143. Plywood from straw: 7, no. 18 (1880): 144. Floating cloth: 7, no. 30 (1880): 239. Butter churner, sewing machine, and fly swatter 8, no. 3 (1881): 23. Alarm clock via telegraph: 8, no. 5 (1881): 39.

[8]Books printed using green ink: 7, no. 18 (1880): 144. Production-line poultry: 7, no. 28 (1880): 223. Moving a hotel: 8, no. 48 (1881): 383. A newspaper edited and published on a Mississippi riverboat: 8, no. 42 (1881): 335. Sea stilts: 6, no. 2 (1879): 14.

[9]The town built in three days and the ship located by an electromagnet: 8, no. 41 (1881): 326–327.

[10]News about Edison: 5, no. 22 (1878):175; 5, no. 27 (1878): 215.

[11]The doctor's fast: 7, no. 33 (1880): 262; 7, no. 34 (1880): 271. The physician, Dr. Menner, supposedly made $137,640 this way. By the way, the first installment includes mention of the arrival in New York of Cleopatra's needle (now in Central Park) from Egypt.

[12]An eclipse of the sun: 5, no. 30 (1878): 239. Comets spotted: 8, no. 29 (1881): 231. A destructive storm in Texas: 7, no. 33 (1880): 263. A heat wave and resulting deaths in Chicago: 5, no. 30 (1878): 239. A Nevada town sinks into the ground: 5, no. 32 (1878): 255. Other atmospheric anomalies: 8, no. 41 (1880): 326–327.

[13]Chains of caves in Virginia: 5, no. 45 (1878): 356; Mammoth Caverns in Kentucky: 6, no. 3 (1879): 23. Giant trees, pieces of which were transported to San Francisco and elsewhere: 6, no. 1 (1879): 7; no. 19 (1879):151; no. 34 (1879): 272. Petrified wood found near Yellowstone: 6, no. 19 (1879): 151. The proposed canal: 6, no. 34 (1879): 271. Niagara Falls freezes over: 6, no. 5 (1879): 39.

[14]Singing sands: 5, no. 50 (1878): 399. The "en-tailed" baby girl: 6, no. 43 (1879): 344.

[15]Marvelous harvests: 5, no. 51 (1878): 403. Wealthy merchants: 7, no. 28 (1880): 223; no. 33 (1880): 262. Yellow fever and its abatement: 5, no. 37 (1878): 292; no. 40 (1878): 316; no. 45 (1878): 356. The plague in Memphis: 5, no. 44 (1878): 351, 356.

[16]"Knowledge of the World and Nature: Eastern North America, First of a Series," an article on the "growth, wealth, and greatness of North America, a haven for many people": 7, no. 26 (1880): 205. On arriving in New York City: 7, no. 27 (1880): 213. The "happy city" of Brooklyn, as well as Jersey City and Hoboken, all teeming with activity, business, and noise: 7, no. 28 (1880): 222–223. New York City railroads built in the air to carry men to work; traffic on the rivers: 7, no. 29 (1880): 230. The Erie Canal to Buffalo and Syracuse; Niagara Falls; the prosperous countryside between New York and Philadelphia: 7, no. 32 (1880): 253. Philadelphia is quieter and calmer than New York: 7, no. 35 (1880): 278–279. Resort towns on the New Jersey shore and the coal and oil deposits of Pennsylvania: 7, no. 39 (1880): 311.

In this issue Mr. Rakovsky, who signs his name for the first time, tells of his plan to travel to California and Washington to convey the immensity of this great land. He tells readers that thirty years previously people went to California to find gold, which has now been discovered in Colorado. The author's trip there: 7, no. 44 (1880): 351. Evening sounds of the prairie as heard on the train to Denver; one-year-old Leadville already has 40,000 inhabitants: 7, no. 45 (1880): 359.

[17]Indian wars: 6, no. 9 (1879): 70; progress in settling them on farms: 7, no. 50 (1880): 397–398. Chinese immigration, including a Jew: 5, no. 54 (1878): 267; 6, no. 12 (1879): 92–93.

[18]On Garfield: 7, no. 48 (1880): 381–382; 8, no. 26 (1881): 202–203; no. 27 (1881): 210; no. 29 (1881): 230; no. 33 (1881): 263.

[19]Reception at the port, opportunities for work in the West and South: 8, no. 46 (1881): 363–364. Impact of the invention of the steamship: 8, no. 49 (1881): 388–389. Relief funds collected for Russian Jewish immigrants: 8, no. 50 (1881): 397.

[20]U.S. disagreements with England over fishing rights: 5, no. 48 (1878): 381. Grant visits Ireland: 6, no. 5 (1879): 35. Hayes on the economic situation: 5, no. 39 (1878): 309.

[21]For example, 5, no. 30 (1878): 236–237, no. 34 (1878): 276; 6, no. 41 (1879): 324, no. 12 (1879): 92; no. 20 (1879):156; no. 27 (1879): 213; 7, no. 2 (1880): 12; no. 12 (1880): 92; no. 26 (1880): 125; no. 24 (1880):189; 8, no. 33 (1881): 263.

[22]"Sam'l of Posen, The Commercial Drummer," a play about a successful Jewish merchant: 8, no. 27 (1881): 214. Review of Sarah Bernhardt in New York: 7, no. 48 (1881): 381. The following year Bernhardt is said to have promised to donate 50,000 francs of her earnings on a forthcoming Russian tour to help Russian Jews leave: 8, no. 43 (1881): 340.

[23]A Jewish coroner and a New York State legislative representative: 5, no. 48 (1878): 381. Benjamin Jonas becomes senator for Louisiana: 6, no. 12 (1879): 93. Various Jews elected to public office in New York: 6, no. 46 (1879): 365; "Mr. Meyer S. Isaacs is appointed judge in the Marine Court": 7, no. 48 (1880): 381–382. Two American Jewish consuls in Germany: 8, no. 11 (1881): 87. Simon Wolf, "a member of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, has been chosen U.S. representative to Egypt": 8, no. 27 (1881): 214. "Simon Wolf, the U. S. representative to Mexico, is welcomed by the Mexican Jewish community": 8, no. 46 (1881): 366–337; Esther I. Panitz, *Simon Wolf: Private Conscience and Public Image* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1987).

[24]The "Lord Mayor" of New York comments on the small percent of Jewish criminals: 5, no. 30 (1878): 238. Jews petition the secretary of state to instruct the U.S. representative in Morocco

to defend the Jewish community there: 6, no. 5 (1879): 35. The president of the UAHC protests to the State Department on sending a U.S. representative to Romania before it carries out its agreements on Jewish rights, and the diplomat is ordered to return to Vienna: 6, no. 46 (1879): 365. Because U.S.-Russian trade talks were about to commence, President Chester A. Arthur is reviewing the difficult situation of American Jews traveling in Russia: 8, no. 47 (1881): 371.

[25]When Jews protested, he apologized for a prayer asking God an increase of "Christian wealth": 7, no. 48 (1880): 381–382.

[26]Christian preachers "of the stature of Henry Ward Beecher" criticized the Germans of anti-Jewish prejudice: 8, no. 7 (1880): 51.

[27]In a notorious incident, often singled out as the inception of the surge of social antisemitism in Gilded Age America, Henry Hilton refused admission of the prominent banker Joseph Seligman to the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga Springs because he was Jewish: 5, no. 28 (1878): 226. Eisenstein reported that in 1879 a donation by Hilton to Jewish charities was turned down: 6, no. 1 (1879): 5. The announcement that "Manhattan River," a summer resort, wanted to refuse Jews triggered protests in newspapers and churches: 6, no. 33 (1879): 258. A hotel in Staten Island refused to admit the Christian wife of a Jewish physician: 7, no. 24 (1880): 189. Eisenstein mentions a bill introduced in the Albany legislature to prohibit discrimination against Jews in hotels: 8, no. 27 (1881): 214.

[28]The B'nai B'rith in Chicago refused to admit a chapter of Jews of Russian and Polish origin: 7, no. 33 (1879): 262; 8, no. 7 (1881): 51 and again in no. 10 (1881): 75.

[29]Retired Rabbi Samuel Adler was censured by his congregation for allowing his daughter to marry during the Ten Days of Repentance: 5, no. 41 (1878): 323–324. Congregation Shearith Israel celebrated its 150th anniversary: 7, no. 16 (1880):125. Congregation Shaarei Tefilot [*sic*] requested reforms in the ritual; the rabbi refused; a compromise was arranged: 6, no. 1 (1879): 4–5. Someone in Chicago wrote that the members of the synagogue work on the Sabbath while the rabbi preached "to three men and seven young girls."

The daughter of a Reform rabbi in Cincinnati married a Christian and her father blessed them. The allusion was to Helen Wise, a daughter of Isaac Mayer Wise, whose elopement with James Molony "was causing great scandal in Cincinnati's Jewish community." The incident is mentioned in *My Life and the New York Times: The Memoirs of Iphigene Ochs Sulzberger*, as written by Susan W. Dryfoos (New York: Times Books, 1987), 13. (Iphigene Sulzberger's mother was another of Isaac Mayer Wise's daughters.)

Jews are deserting Hebrew, the Sabbath, and religion, 5, no. 40 (1878): 316. "In Europe the rabbi leads the congregation; in the United State the congregation leads the rabbi": 6, no. 23 (1879): 200. Eisenstein reports (and rejects) a suggestion to move Sabbath observance to Sunday: 6, no. 31 (1879): 242–244. Dr. Gottheil of the Reformers wants to compose yet another new prayer book: 6, no. 41 (1879): 324. The picture given by the correspondents about American Judaism is not completely negative: "Jews in America are beginning to appreciate their old traditions, even though they recast them in new forms": 8, no. 47 (1881): 373. "The Orthodox and their leaders still follow the Torah": 6, no. 22 (1879): 173.

[30]He categorized the newly formed Ethical Culture Society together with Humanists, Spiritualists, and Robert Ingersoll's agnosticism: 6, no. 20 (1879): 156.

[31]A synagogue of Polish Jews initiates Talmud classes: 6, no. 5 (1879): 35–36. The creation of a *Shomrei Shabbat* association: 7, no. 3 (1880):12; no. 16 (1880): 138. Plans to appoint someone from Europe as chief rabbi of New York and of the United States: 6, no. 33 (1879): 258. The proposed candidate was the noted Talmud scholar and Bible commentator Rabbi Meir Leibish ben Yechiel Michel Weiser (1809–1879), known by the acronym Malbim; see Abraham J. Karp, "New York Chooses a Chief Rabbi," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 44, no. 3 (March 1955): 129–199, especially 130–135.

[32]Uncircumcised Jews: 7, no. 12 (1880): 92. A gentile about to convert to marry a Jewish girl remarks to the *mohel* that he doubts if the operation will make him a better human being: 7, no. 2 (1880): 12. The Purim ball postponed because of Lent: 7, no. 24 (1880): 189.

[33]Meetings of the UAHC: 5, no. 7 (1878): 53; 6, no. 31 (1879): 242–244, including a plan to build a rabbinic school (the future Hebrew Union College) in Cincinnati.

[34]Eisenstein opined that the attempt to found Jewish agricultural colonies in America would not succeed because in the United States merchants are more honored and necessary than farmers: 6, no. 24 (1879): 188. A subsequent issue contains a long footnote by the editor of *Ha-Zefirah* that Jews should be encouraged to farm: 6, no. 31 (1789): 243. The following year there is a report that "many Jews in North America plan to name Jewish agricultural settlements after R. Isaac [that is, Adolphe] Crémieux": 7, no. 25 (1880): 199. Adolphe Crémieux was a prominent French liberal and the head of the Consistoire Central des Israélites de France. In 1881, money is being raised to settle Russian Jews on farms in the United States: 8, no. 29 (1881): 252.

[35]Gold scam: 5, no. 7 (1878): 53; 6, no. 31 (1879): 242–244.

[36]An *agunah* asks for news about her husband in America, who has not written her in three years: 5, no. 50 (1878): 400. She repeats her request in 6, no. 17 (1879): 136; no.18 (1879):144; and no. 19 (1879):152. Another *agunah* notifies Jews in New York that her husband took her money and jewels when he left for America and refuses to support his two children: 8, no. 11 (1881): 87. A third *agunah* asks about her husband, who left for America two years previously: 8, no. 41 (1881): 328. A fourth *agunah* advertises for her husband, who left for America five years ago: 8, no. 49 (1881): 392.

[37]Husband cleared and rabbi's signature on future letters required: 7, no. 37 (1880): 296; no. 38 (1880): 304; no. 42 (1880): 336; no. 44 (1880): 351–352.

[38]The advertisement appears in the following issues in 6 (1878): no. 11: 88; no. 14: 112; no. 15: 120; no. 16: 128; no. 17: 136; no. 18: 144; no. 119: 52; no. 20: 160; no. 21: 168; no. 22: 176; no. 25: 200; no. 27: 218; no. 28: 224; no. 29: 232; no. 30: 240; no. 31: 348; no. 32: 256; no. 33: 264; no. 34: 272; and no. 35: 280.

[39]In immigration statistics for the United States for the year: 7, no. 46 (1880): 367. On the pogroms of 1881–1882, the "storms in the south," and their impact on Jewish emigration, see Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881*, ch. 13, esp. 150–151.

[40]At this point the Russian calendar was almost two weeks behind the western one because the Russian Orthodox Church rejected the changes introduced under the auspices of the pope.

[41]This report is reproduced at http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/colonies_of_ukraine/from_the_hebrew_press_1958.htm. The passage, along with other citations from *Ha-Zefirah* and other Hebrew newspapers of the time, was translated by Chaim Freedman.

[42]For reports from Berlin, Antwerp, Hamburg, Odessa, and especially Brody, see 8 (1881): no. 23: 183; no. 34: 271; no. 35: 276; no. 35: 277–278; no. 36: 283; no. 37: 290; no. 39: 306–307; no. 39:311; no. 40: 317; no. 41: 324; no. 42: 333; no. 43: 340; no. 43: 343; no. 44:347; no. 45: 355; no. 48: 380; no. 49: 391. The people pouring into Brody are described as destitute; the city government was said to have tried to seal the border to prevent more from arriving. As noted earlier, the flood of prospective arrivals prompted Eisenstein to write an extensive series for the immigrant in 8 (1881): no. 46: 363–364; no. 48: 381; no. 49: 388–389; no. 50: 397.

"Free America": Glimpses of Jewish Immigrant Life in the Pages of American *Brivnshtelers*

Alice Nakhimovsky and Roberta Newman

At the turn of the twentieth century, Jewish families scattered by migration were forced to adopt what some called "a paper life"—a life of letters.[1] In correspondence between Europe and America, and between big cities and shtetls, Jews struggled to maintain contact with distant family members in letters that discussed what mattered to them most: the search for economic security and the ups and downs of everyday life. In both eastern Europe and America, Jews wrote business letters, courtship letters, and all manner of emotionally intense family letters.

While learning to write letters in Yiddish was the one stable aspect of girls' education in Russian and Polish shtetls (with special tutors sometimes hired for this purpose), writing Yiddish was not a regular part of the curriculum for boys in the *kheyder* until perhaps beginning in the late nineteenth century.[2] But even for people who had some training in writing Yiddish, letter-writing could pose problems. How do you communicate on paper your feelings, thoughts, and requests in a style different from everyday, spoken Yiddish? How do you make sure that you are spelling words correctly and organizing your thoughts in the proper fashion? One path to reassurance was the "letter-writer" (*brivnshteler* in Yiddish), a book of model letters for all occasions public and private.[3] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, more than thirty *brivnshtelers* by more than fifteen authors were published in the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires in cheap, affordable editions, with some books going into multiple printings.[4] This kind of demand suggests that the books were likely to be found in many Jewish homes and in the hands of many Jewish tutors.[5] Another mark of popularity is parody. A character in Isaac Bashevis Singer's story "A Crown of Feathers" dismisses a suitor with a comment that he sounds like a *brivnshteler*.[6] Sholem Aleichem—who seems to have toyed with the idea of writing a *brivnshteler*[7]—parodied formulaic openings and closings in his Menakhem Mendl letters (serialized 1892–1913).

The American-Yiddish *brivnshteler* was a small genre, the province of a handful of authors. This essay will focus on the work of three of them: Nokhem Meir Shaykevitsh (1849?–1905), Alexander Harkavy (1863–1939), and Benzion Eisenstadt (1873–1951). *Shaykevits'es nayer briefenshteler* (Shaykevitsh's new *brivnshteler*, New York, 1905) and *Harkavy's amerikanisher briefen-shteler* (Harkavy's American *brivnshteler*, New York, 1902) advertise the prominence of their authors directly in their titles; these publications went into multiple later editions. Eisenstadt's *Der Moderner Brieffenshteller* (The modern *brivnshteler*,

New York, 1910) had only a single edition but is a rich source of thinking about Jewish identity and family life.[8]

These three *brivnshtelers* were published during the height of the mass immigration of eastern European Jews to the United States. Within each book, letters of all types—courtship, business, social, and family—reflect the writer's understanding of the needs of his immigrant readers, as well as his vision of how these readers should become American Jews. In the distinctive approach of each *brivnshteler*, we get glimpses of the diverse attitudes, ideologies, and experiences of the American Jewish immigrant community at the turn of the twentieth century.

The popularity of *Shaykevitsh'es nayer briefenshteler* is inseparable from the popularity, or notoriety, of its author, who wrote under the pen name Shomer. The author of hundreds of potboiler novels on romantic and historical themes, Shaykevitsh/Shomer provided generations of Yiddish-speaking women and (as Iris Parush shows, more than a few men[9]) with a stirring vision of life beyond the shtetl. Intellectuals like Simon Dubnow and serious writers—most famously, Sholem Aleichem, who skewered him in a diatribe called *Shomers mishpet* (The Trial of Shomer, 1888)—saw him as a purveyor of literary trash and hence an impediment to Yiddish cultural development. Shaykevitsh spent the last sixteen years of his life in the United States. Had he had any expectation of the funeral he would receive—an unprecedented public extravaganza, organized in part by his enemies at the *Forverts*[10]—he might have been less bitter. As it was, he concludes his *brivnshteler* with an ironic letter to his readers, comparing the Yiddish reader to someone who has been eating happily at a restaurant for many years until he is told that the food is unhealthy, at which point "he starts screaming *moves bsir* ('there's death in this restaurant's pots')." Shaykevitsh's conclusion combines a belief in the worth of his work—in particular the *brivnshteler*—with the barest hope that purchasers might reconsider their attitudes:

> So I ask you: if you yourself have enough understanding to see the importance of this *brivnshteler*; if you don't rely on the expert opinions of certain people who turn black to white and dark to light, then you will bring great joy to your old acquaintance, THE WRITER.[11]

The consummate philologist and lexicographer Alexander Harkavy had a very different professional profile. Among the earliest and greatest Yiddishists, Harkavy arrived in the United States in 1881. Best known for his trilingual Yiddish-English-Hebrew dictionary of 1928, he wrote scholarly works on Yiddish linguistics and folklore, edited a variety of Yiddish literary anthologies, and prepared a Yiddish translation of *Don Quixote*. Closer to the spirit of his *brivnshteler* are his educational works, notably a series of English grammar books that he wrote in Yiddish, Hebrew, and Russian. Harkavy's *brivnshteler* is bilingual and intended, at least in part, as a textbook of English language and

American manners. (He also wrote a bilingual English-Russian *brivnshteler*, which serves the same purpose for an overlapping set of immigrants.) If there is a contradiction in the image of a Yiddishist teaching immigrants the language and style of upper crust America, it may be related to what Dovid Katz describes as Harkavy's crossing of ideological boundaries.[12] Or it may simply be a maskilic commitment to making Yiddish-speakers bilingual and bicultural, with American letter-writers as the authoritative source of how Americans write and act.

Benzion Eisenstadt was not a household name among the immigrant masses on the level of Shomer or even Harkavy. Born in Kleck, a shtetl in Belorussia, he immigrated to the United States in 1903. A prolific author of Hebrew works, such as biographies of rabbis (including Orthodox rabbis in America) and sermons, he is the most religiously traditional of our three authors. *Der moderner Brieffenshteller* may have been his only foray into more secular provinces.[13]

Much of what unites Shaykevitsh and Eisenstadt, and differentiates both from Harkavy, is traceable to the tradition of the eastern European *brivnshteler*. Like the American version, the *brivnshteler* in Russia and Poland served its readers as a model for modernization and, in some cases, acculturation. Changing customs were reflected in courtship correspondence, with flowery letters between *khosn* (bridegroom) and *kale* (bride) marking the incursion of modern romance into the arranged marriage. But the most notable feature of the eastern European *brivnshteler* is its highly emotional correspondence between parents and children. Small children write anxious letters to fathers who are away; older children, married or simply studying elsewhere, are an endless source of parental worry. The *brivnshtelers* openly acknowledge this anxiety—a kind of barometer of love—to an extent where it seems almost as if the very point of their existence is to provide words for it.

Harkavy largely rejects the eastern European tradition, using the American letter-writer (and its Russian equivalent, the *pis'movnik*) as a model. American letter-writers contemporary to Harkavy teach a style of writing whose hallmark is brevity.[14] In these books, emotional intensity is reserved for love letters, with men expressing ardent love and women responding either with affection or—in the case of a rejection—cool rationality. American letter-writers do contain letters about life's reversals, but in stark contrast to the eastern European *brivnshteler*, they spend no time on potential disasters. This does not, of course, mean that Americans did not worry, simply that letter-writing manuals appear not to have considered fantasies about catastrophe as suitable subjects for correspondence. When bad things *do* happen, the operant words in their letters are "duty," "perseverance," and, when appropriate, "manliness."

Describing America

Two of our authors, Shomer and Eisenstadt, follow through on the promises made in their introductions to provide letters for every eventuality.[15] They provide

model letters useful even for their Jewish immigrant readers' first moments in the New World, despite the unlikelihood that someone just off the boat would have prioritized the purchase of a *brivnshteler*. Both *Shaykevitsh'es nayer briefenshteler* and Eisenstadt's *Der moderner brieffenshteller* include several examples of letters that new immigrants could send home to family in Europe within their first days after landing in New York Harbor.

In Eisenstadt, Zusman Lipshits writes to his parents not two hours after his arrival in "the free America," describing a difficult journey in which his ship was mired in a fog and the passengers frightened by the constant sounding of the foghorn. But thank God, they arrived in port safely, and

> … as soon as we saw the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor, it became bright before everyone's eyes.
>
> We were deeply inspired by the American symbol as expressed in the image of an angel standing in the middle of a vast and stormy sea holding outstretched his [*sic*] hand and inviting everyone who is lonely and homeless to turn to him so that he can take them under his wings and protect them and stretch out a helping hand to them.[16]

This celebratory tone is repeated in *Shaykevitsh'es nayer briefenshteler* in a letter from Leah Goldberg to her parents:

> Not for nothing does the world have the proverb: 'The devil is not so terrible as he has been described.' This is very true. In our small *shtetlekh* it is believed that traveling to America is a sort of trip to hell and one imagines the most terrible things about this journey.… When you arrive in New York you encounter so many acquaintances from home that you think you're still in the shtetl.
>
> There is not a single town in Russia, Austria, and Romania that hasn't sent a few families to America, and so a new arrival, or as it is called here, a greener, won't fail. His landsmen help him with advice (and most of the time with actual help). Blessed is America for the fact that here, working is no disgrace. Everyone works: old and young, men and women, and as long as one wants to work, there is no lack of work in New York. [17]

The condescending tone of Leah's letter is echoed in other glowing letters about America in both *brivnshtelers*. Both authors seem to suggest that merely stepping foot on American soil effects an immediate transformation of the eastern European Jew into someone who, in comparison with those left behind, is already a sophisticate, a man or woman of the world. How to describe the unimaginably different world of America to one's friends or family back home in the shtetl? Shaykevitsh's Yitskhok Dov Ayzenshteyn, a Jew who has apparently been in America for some years already, writes in response to a friend's query:

> It seems to you, as it appears, that it is a trifle to write about what kind of land America is and how one lives here….
>
> What then do you want, my friend? That I should describe for you everything clearly and in detail in connection with America and her inhabitants?
>
> No, this would take years and reams of paper!…
>
> This, my friend, is no little village or a small town. This is a world of little universes. Here live people from every continent, from all countries, from every city and from every nation.

America is a veritable Garden of Eden, and here one can see "how far our Yankele can work himself up when he is given full freedom."[18] Another letter in Shaykevitsh, from Marcus Tarkin, makes the point that, though his economic prospects in the shtetl had been dim, in America, "every person needs only good skills to have here the best opportunity to draw upon and use them."[19]

Despite these advertisements for America, however, both Shomer and Eisenstadt pull back from endorsing everything about American life or from touting America as an option for every single Jew in Europe. Yoysef Bernshteyn in Eisenstadt gives his friend Avrom cautious advice:

> You ask me whether it would be worth it for you to come to America. And believe me, I can't give you any correct answer to such a question. America is like the whole world, everywhere one must have a bit of luck. People who are entirely common and ordinary come here and work themselves up to being propertied, and on the contrary, here one sees intelligent and educated people who are not very well-off.
>
> Naturally, there is more room to make a living in America than in another country, but it depends a lot on the talent for work and even more on getting the right job.[20]

Shaykevitsh's Leah, too, warns those back home about having too rosy a view of life in America:

> You know what an impression our shtetl inhabitants have of America. They believe that gold is scraped up off the street here with shovels because Khayim Yankel the tailor, who in our shtetl didn't earn dry bread, sent, in the first year that he lived in America, a whole two hundred rubles to his Khane Dvoyre, and Beyle, the daughter of Khasye the storekeeper, sent her mother money for a wig and a coat.
>
> In our shtetl, they believe that here in America everyone lives like kings, in fine palaces with the most expensive furniture and that one travels around in equipages.[21]

She complains about the high cost of living, noting that while ten dollars would be a fortune in Russia, it does not go far in New York, if one wants to dress fashionably and enjoy a few luxuries.

The brutal pace of work in America is the most oft-cited drawback of life in the New World. While some immigrants arrived with tailoring skills and experience of city living, many others had to learn their trade on the job, in sweatshops and factories where work hours and other conditions differed markedly from those of the small-town workshops they were used to. Eisenstadt has Avrom Kaplan write to his sister that he does not think that she should come to America:

> There is no doubt that for girls who love and are comfortable with work or business America is certainly much better than any country in Europe. In America women work on average almost like men. However, I don't know, devoted sister, if working in American factories (shops) will be too hard for someone like you who has always been accustomed to fresh air and easy work.
>
> It is true that America pays higher wages than other countries but, by the same token, the work in America is much harder and more strenuous than work in other nations. The worker in the United States is a real slave and during working hours he must be punctual about getting up in the morning and until late in the evening must keep his head and shoulders bowed, and, in addition, remain sitting in the factory, which is usually dark, without air or sunshine, and dusty.[22]

But his sister apparently persists in her determination to come to America because there is a second letter, in which Avrom becomes even more graphic in his description of the ill effects of factory work on young women:

> Don't forget, dear sister, that a girl of your age will have to go work in the shops, and God forbid, become a ruin. Don't look, dear sister, at the pictures that the girls from our hometown send to their relatives in Europe, and which make it seem that in America, everyone shines like a mirror, that everyone is beautiful and doing well. Don't forget, beloved, that it is nothing more than a picture that gets gussied up and tinted by artistic workers here. I can give you the example of Ruvn's daughters, how dark and gloomy they are in reality, how white their faces are without a drop of blood in them—even though their pictures, that they sent off to their parents this summer, caused a stir in the shtetl—and then you will see what a terrible ruin America makes out of girls who are like you.[23]

A rare female correspondent in Eisenstadt, Basye Strauss, continues on in this vein, complaining that she has not had the time to write her friend a letter because work in the factory, from which she does not get home until eight o'clock at night, leaves her so exhausted that she has not written her "beloved

parents" more than five times during her year in America. She adds that in order to write this particular letter, she has "had to give up a day's work, which represents a sizeable portion of my earnings."[24]

Shaykevitsh, too, focuses on the particular hardships for women in the workshops and factories of America, but his view of their prospects is considerably less bleak than Eisenstadt's. Leah, whom we first became acquainted with moments after her arrival in New York and who has gone to work in a glove factory, is more upbeat than Basye about America. Yes, workers in America must labor bitterly and live in "airless rooms." But here in America, a girl does not need a dowry to marry. "If a girl in America isn't ugly and is respectable, she can easily find a groom who will take her as she is." Many times, she has regretted coming to America, but when she sees how other girls who came with as little as she has have progressed and are now rich and married to upstanding men, she is inspired.[25]

Despite the ambivalence about America expressed in both Shaykevitsh and Eisenstadt, their *brivnshtelers* stand in marked contrast to the almost uniformly negative portrayal of America in contemporaneous *brivnshtelers* published in eastern Europe.[26] The mass emigration of Jews to the United States is given surprisingly short shrift in European *brivnshtelers*, which devote most of their pages to letters to and from internal migrants to large cities, such as Warsaw and Lodz. The rare letter to or from America, as often as not, paints the New World not as a place of opportunity—the dominant perspective of the American *brivnshtelers*—but as a place of purgatory and punishment for Jewish boys who have messed up by not applying themselves to their studies or apprenticeships and thus must go into exile for the sake of economic survival. Some of these fictional immigrants write to their parents begging for assistance to return to Europe.[27]

But Shaykevitsh and Eisenstadt assume that their readers are in America for good. Their connections to the Old Country are now a matter of keeping in touch with and sending money to families back home and weighing the pros and cons of sending steamship tickets to wives and children, fiancées, and siblings, so that they can come and join them in the "golden land."[28]

Business

Unlike Shaykevitsh and Eisenstadt's *brivnshtelers*, *Harkavy's amerikanisher briefen-shteler* assumes a reader who is already firmly ensconced in America. As its title shows, it is an "American" *brivnshteler*, firmly focused on the here and now, with nary a backward glance at the Old Country. Absent entirely is any material relating to an immigrant's first days in America or letters between immigrants and relatives back home in Europe. All the letters in this bilingual Yiddish-English letter-writer are intended for recipients in America, and the Yiddish letters are included only as a tool for helping the reader learn how to write proper English.[29]

But while at first glance it might seem as if Harkavy's letters—intent on smoothing the rough edges of the Jewish immigrant into the unaccented blandness of a properly English-speaking, well-mannered American—lack content related to the American Jewish experience, a closer look reveals that the book is written very much with the needs of the Jewish immigrant in mind, albeit one who has been here long enough to be ready to take the next step in Americanization and upward mobility by writing letters in English. This is demonstrated by the book's more than fifty pages of business letters. Harkavy's businessmen deal almost exclusively in dry goods, the manufacture and sale of which was the most common occupation for Jews in New York in the 1890s.[30] They have Americanized Jewish names (Goodman, Blank, Newman) and correspond with other businessmen, Jewish and non-Jewish (Richards, Williams), about the purchase and sale of cloth, shoddy merchandise, mistakes in billing, and announcements of the opening of new dry goods establishments. There are almost no letters in *Harkavy's amerikanisher briefen-shteler* related to employment in factories, sweatshops, or peddling.[31]

Harkavy's readers may have "arrived" in the sense of having amassed enough capital to open their own businesses, but this new status was precarious, as evidenced by the many letters dealing with requests for credit and for deferment of payments on loans. Harkavy's letters, like those in American letter-writers, handle the topic of debt calmly, in a neutral, businesslike style. Quite different are the loan and debt letters in Eisenstadt and Shaykevitsh, which are emotional and personal, full of appeals to friendship and kinship. Consider, for example, how a tenant who is delinquent in his rent writes to his landlord in *Harkavy's amerikanisher briefen-shteler*:

> From a Tenant, Excusing Delay of Payment.
>
> Sir:—I have now been your tenant above ten years in the house where I now live, and you know that I never failed to pay my rent quarterly when due. At present I am extremely sorry to inform you that from a variety of recent disappointments, I am under the necessity of begging that you will wait one quarter longer. By that time I hope to have it in my power to answer your just demand, and the favor shall be ever remembered by
>
> Your obedient servant.[32]

Eisenstadt handles the same situation as follows:

> Esteemed Mr. Landa!
>
> Please excuse me for not paying the rent this time. Right now, as you are no doubt aware, I have not worked for a whole month, and especially, my two dear children were very sick this month, and this put a lot of pressure on me. I hope that such a refined man as yourself, who has empathy for the plight

of someone else, will patiently and calmly wait until next month, when I expect to obtain work and will bring the first money that I receive to you, with thanks.

Your friend,

Yoysef Berman[33]

The sequence concludes with a reply from Mr. Landa, the landlord, who assures Berman that he knows him to be an honest man who doesn't ask for handouts from strangers and that he and his "agent" trust him to pay the rent when his situation improves.[34]

Eisenstadt's Berman makes a bid for his landlord's sympathies, not hesitating to mention his sick children, and he announces his insolvency without apology. Harkavy's letter is as impersonal as a form letter. He eschews emotion, and one can all but hear the writer clearing his throat in embarrassment when he speaks of his "recent disappointments." This letter, like many of the letters in Harkavy, is likely to have been pirated or lightly adapted from an existing English-language letter-writer, with changes in the names of the correspondents and an added focus on the garment trade as the only nods to the ethnic identities of its intended readership.[35] The assumption is, apparently, that to properly Americanize, one must step out of the confines of one's ethnic community and shed one's cultural style as well as one's language.

By contrast, letters about credit and debt in Eisenstadt and Shaykevitsh are exclusively between Jews. Often the creditor and debtor are old friends as well as business associates, and the letters are not only emotional, but openly angry and very personal. In Eisenstadt, Mordkhe Zeligson writes to M. Aleksandrov supposedly for the third time about the sixty-five-dollar tab that the latter has racked up in his store. Zeligson stood by Aleksandrov when he was down and out, and now Aleksandrov has been working for a whole year already, but he still hasn't paid his bill. Moreover, Zeligson is a poor storekeeper who works from early in the morning to late at night—in short, he is not a wealthy man. He is getting to the point where he is thinking of taking Aleksandrov to "court" (the English word is supplied in Yiddish transliteration and glossed). Aleksandrov replies, offended, saying that there is no need for such an angry tone and that it's really not true that he is making a fine living. In fact, he is often out of work. Furthermore, there has been sickness in his house. He'll try to pay his debt soon.[36]

Shaykevitsh in particular seems to take into the account the possibility that some of his readers might encounter a real reversal of fortune and end up destitute. The introduction to his section on "Friendship Letters" divides these letters into different categories, one of which is correspondence between former friends who are no longer in the same social class due to the rise of one and/

or the fall of the other.[37] He includes two letters from men down on their luck begging for financial assistance from wealthy men. Both letters make naked appeals not only to the potential benefactor's generosity but also to the shared Jewish kinship of both parties. In one of the letters, Mordkhe Rozenthal writes to an old friend who is doing well financially, asking him for a job, a letter of recommendation, or a loan:

> I won't bother you by describing my sad situation. I will only tell you that *Bo'u mayim ad nefesh*[38]—the water is already rising up to my soul, and we might all, God forbid, be extinguished due to our lack of all that a human being needs to live.… Loan me a little money so that I can do a bit of business and if God helps me, I will return your *gmiles khesed* with the utmost gratitude at my first opportunity.
>
> The tears are pouring from my eyes and I can't write any more. So I am ending my letter with the hope that my words won't be *k'kol kore bmidbar* [39](like one who cries out in a wilderness).[40]

The biblical passages are glossed in Yiddish, in a concession to the possibility that the reader was not educated enough to know their meaning. This is not the only letter in which Shaykevitsh includes Hebrew phrases and words. They are there to give letters a more educated, high-class tone and also to remind the recipients of their religious duty to be charitable and merciful when it comes to dispensing financial aid or forgiving business or other transgressions. Eisenstadt also does not hesitate to pepper his letters with Hebrew terms. His intention is to present his readers with letters that "always uses a plain and pure prose style which reads the way people speak" and that includes Hebrew words commonly used in Yiddish.[41] He helpfully indicates these words with quotation marks to draw them to the reader's attention. No doubt this is to help readers learn to spell them correctly, as less-educated Yiddish-speakers tend to spell *loshn-koydeshe* (Hebrew) words phonetically and incorrectly in their correspondence.

Jewishness in America

The use of Hebrew in both Eisenstadt and Shaykevitsh is not only a matter of utilitarianism in correspondence but is also an expression of the authors' philosophical positions on Jewishness in America. In letter after letter, Shaykevitsh stresses the need for a "modern" outlook even as he urges his readers not to turn their backs on Jewish tradition altogether, scolding, for instance, those who scoff at bar mitzvah ceremonies. In one letter, he depicts a father who objects to his son marrying a girl whose family is without *yikhes* (lineage).[42] But he reserves his real enthusiasm for the possibilities America offers for secular Jewish culture, even as he takes a somewhat apologetic tone about Yiddish—the vehicle for his fame as a writer—acknowledging the low regard in which it was held by many in the Jewish intelligentsia. In answer to a friend's question, "What is the state

of Yiddish literature in America?" Shaykevitsh's Yankev Moyshe Vebman writes, "[I]t is a joy to see how our *zhargonishe* (Yiddish) literature has developed in America. There have never been as many good writers and excellent poets in our poor language as there are today." Yiddish literature in America can hold its head high, Vebman continues. The major English newspapers frequently print translations of stories and articles from the Yiddish press, and the Yiddish writers in New York have even formed a union. And who would have believed that in New York City alone there would be five Yiddish daily newspapers, not to mention monthlies, annuals, and five Yiddish theaters?[43]

Compared to Shaykevitsh, Eisenstadt spends much more time on the topic of Jewishness in America. His *brivnshteler* is chock-full of letters related to Jewish communal life and even includes a selection of letters written in Hebrew, as well as a couple of sample bar mitzvah speeches to be delivered by the boy's father and teacher. But at the same time, it is apparent that he is aware that his readership includes Jews of all stripes, not only the steadfastly Orthodox but also, as Jenna Weissman Joselit puts it, Jews "who were highly selective in their approach to ritual behavior and cultural identity" and were given to "ignoring, retaining, modifying, adapting, inventing, reappropriating, and reconstructing tradition."[44]

Eisenstadt's position is that Judaism can and must survive in America, but he seems more than willing to acknowledge that its practices might, at least on the surface, need to be modified to suit new lifestyles. Whereas Shaykevitsh portrays Jewish ritual as old-fashioned but nonetheless deserving of respect, Eisenstadt promotes the combining of Jewishness and religious observance with the everyday realities of life in America. His model letters paint a world in which there are synagogues and Jewish educational institutions and communal organizations (albeit in a different form from those in Europe). Indeed, the types of letters he supplies—invitations to a benefit picnic of the "Brooklyn *lines-hatsedek*" (aid society for the indigent sick), requests for the recommendation of a Hebrew teacher, a reminder from the *shames* (beadle) to a member of a shul about his father's *yahrzeit*—are not to be found in any European *brivnshteler* and reflect circumstances that would have been alien to religious life in Russia and Poland. He even includes a text that playfully acknowledges the Jewish popular culture of the time—a letter from the head of one Yiddish theater to the head of another, rival Yiddish theater:

> Worthy Herr Thomashefsky and his worthy wife!
>
> Enclosed are two tickets to Adler's Grand Theater for the play, "Bar Kochba," which will be performed Monday evening, January 15 as a benefit for the Brooklyn Gmiles Khsodim (free loan society). I believe that you will certainly do us the honor of attending the play, as your presence is very important for us and can do a great deal of good for the noble work of the Gmiles Khesed.

On behalf of the directors and the board,

M. Breslav (Secretary)

(Seal of the association)[45]

Here, Eisenstadt has Thomashefsky graciously accepting Breslav's invitation and sending ten dollars as a donation to the charity.

While Eisenstadt demonstrates his familiarity with benefit performances and other fundraising techniques used by Jewish charities in the New World, his communal organizations retain the European names for such institutions (Gmiles Khesed, Lines Hatsedek), rather than the "benevolent associations," "progressive aid societies," "free loan societies," and other anglicized names that immigrant associations in real-life New York preferred. In the last section of his *brivnshteler*, his set of Hebrew letters envisions an America that is not completely devoid of a Hebrew-speaking intelligentsia: there is a letter from a *prenumerant* (an advance subscriber to a forthcoming book); an invitation to a rabbi to deliver a speech in honor of a *siyem toyre* (celebration to mark the completion of the writing of a Torah scroll) in a synagogue in Brownsville, Brooklyn; and an invitation to a dignitary asking him to deliver an address at a special event in honor of the opening of the Ninth Zionist Congress.

Indeed, Eisenstadt seems, in no small measure, intent on dispelling the stereotype of America as a place devoid of Jewishness. In one letter, titled, "A son in America reassures his father in Europe that he has remained as steadfast in his Judaism as he was back home," Reuven Fink writes:

> It is completely unnecessary, devoted father, to instruct me in your letter to observe the Sabbath, in particular, and to maintain *yiddishkeit* in general, because you know me, dear father. You know that I have always trod one path, whether sitting in Kiev or Odessa, Warsaw or Moscow, I nonetheless kept intensely to my Jewish customs, especially the Sabbath, which is one of the greatest and strongest Jewish fundaments. I have never traded Judaism for money or even for riches and property.
>
> I can go as far as to write you that in my present occupation, I was offered a job in which I could get 3 dollars more a week than I do now; however, it would have involved me having to do business on the Sabbath and on the Jewish holidays and so I didn't take it, because for me, resting during the holy Jewish days is much dearer than money.
>
> I am also a member of a beautiful *shul* where I go to worship every Sabbath and holiday.[46]

These concerns about lack of religious observance are almost completely absent from European *brivnshtelers*.[47] Indeed, lurking throughout Eisenstadt is the fear that America poses particular challenges to the continuation of Jewish

life and identity, not only for the untutored masses but even for those with a highly refined Jewish education. This anxiety finds its fullest expression in an exchange of letters in which one Jew accuses another of permitting a Christmas tree in his home:

> I have heard from a reliable source, that, dear friend, in your house, where there are treasures with our best Jewish pearls; where there are many, many of the best Jewish holy books; in your Jewish home where mezuzahs hang on the doorposts and beautiful pictures of our greatest spiritual giants decorate and adorn the walls—in that same house, you permitted the Christmas rituals to be observed in all their "holiness," may it not be so, and in your house you allowed the display of a tree around which your children celebrated in nothing less than a goyish way. My dear friend! Consider carefully what you have done. It might seem like "child's play," an enjoyable occasion and nothing more. But it smacks of something completely different and my feeling is that if such a Jewish Jew like you—a man like you who was brought up among such passionate and warm Jewish patriots—have allowed this to be done in your house, then what will the vulgar and ignorant masses end up doing?
>
> It is possible, dear friend, that maybe it was done without your permission; maybe no one asked you. We know the children of today, and know that they infrequently consult their parents. It's possible that the seemingly "modern" and "civilized" children who constantly imitate the Christians were the ones who brought the "green crucifix" into your house, and that their "kosher" hands planted the non-Jewish plant, completely without your knowledge. But I believe, dear friend, that an educated and learned man like you should have known how to handle this sort of situation. You should have known that this kind of "child's play" always ends in the worst, most terrible and saddest tragedy of "assimilation," which is not only the death of *yidishkeyt*, but also a very, very shameful and ugly death. You should have known that in the final result these sort of "playthings" bring with them no honor but only degradation and spiritual malaise into the Jewish home.[48]

The accused replies that it is all a false rumor spread, perhaps, by his "enemies," and that he remains as pious and Sabbath-observing as ever:

> I am very upset, my friend, and can hardly hold the pen in my hand.… Yes, it is true that on Christmas day, my children and also a few friends and acquaintances gathered at my house and that we enjoyed ourselves a little bit. But this affair was not mixed with or connected in any way with Christmas rituals. It was very simple—since neither the children nor our acquaintances were working that day or doing business, they spent that day at my house. But whoever saw a "tree" or all these silly and mysterious rituals that you are going on about so much?… You know my rigorous and steadfast loyalty to my people and all of their holiness, you know that for years and years I have fought so that my children would observe the Sabbath and holidays, and not

> defile the holy days, even when I have suffered from hunger and cold. You know this quite well and such a terrible accusation against me at my age has really embittered my heart.[49]

Passing on Jewish traditions to one's children indeed takes a special place in *Der moderner briffenshteller*. Eisenstadt's focus on bar mitzvahs is a case in point. He has included several sample invitations to bar mitzvahs, as well as one letter in which Uncle Elkhanon Harkavy regrets that he can't make it to his nephew Alexander's celebration because he is tied up with business but that he is sending as a gift a very old Bible bound in silver with, on one side, the bar mitzvah boy's monogram in gold and on the other side, his own monogram. He is sorry that he will miss the boy's speech "about *yiddishkeit* in three languages."[50] There are also three bar mitzvah speeches, one in Hebrew and two in Yiddish, reflecting the new prominence of this ritual in American Jewish life.[51] The Hebrew bar mitzvah speech was written with the bar mitzvah boy himself in mind, but the Yiddish speeches were to be delivered by, respectively, the boy's father and his teacher. The speech for the father takes an overprotective tone (he has trouble with the idea that he is no longer officially responsible for his son's actions) and interprets the son's new responsibility to lay *tefilin* as a symbol not only of his fealty to Judaism but also as a defense against antisemitic violence:

> Until now, given his extreme youth, when he still didn't have an impression of education, of knowledge, of religion, of spirit and morality, he could also make mistakes, but not now, not now when he has already begun to see and sense the pure radiance of our Jewish religion, of our Jewish nation, not now when he has come into a position… to fortify [his faith] with might against external enemies and to bind his head with such a holy and strong bandage as the *tefilin*.
>
> Now . . my child is ensured protection from the enemy, who has a mighty hand, and he will protect his head so that he will not be hit by the unexpected, horrible bullets that hover perpetually over the Jew's head.[52]

The speech written for the teacher to deliver takes a different approach by attempting to address cynicism about the very custom of the bar mitzvah *droshe* (sermon). It acknowledges that everyone knows that the bar mitzvah boy has not single-handedly written his speech but that this does not matter. The point of the ceremony needn't be the display of erudition but, instead, one's willingness to take on the ethical precepts and moral obligations of Judaism. Eisenstadt makes the point that this is a communal endeavor, a joint effort on the part of the bar mitzvah boy, his parents, and his teachers:

> And because of this, we consider the entire bar mitzvah speech ritual holy. It is true that the young child did not write or craft it by himself, but we Jews take pride not in our intellectuals themselves, in those who can create and

> write. We take pride only in the good and noble practical work that we do from our hearts, with which the peoples of the world cannot compete, because we have more heart, more blood, more spirit than they do.… [we take pride] when the child now indicates that he is drawn to the holy Jewish principles, the holy Jewish feelings. This is not some hopeful fantasy—it is nothing but the pure, godly soul that encourages him in this direction.[53]

This bar mitzvah speech is the very last item in Eisenstadt's book and thus carries a certain weight. It emphasizes scholarship and erudition, important to both Orthodox Jews and *maskilim* (proponents of the Jewish Enlightenment). But it also acknowledges that this is probably not where American Jewry is headed, and that, as an alternative, the continuation of Judaism might draw strength from ethnic pride and a new focus on ethical traditions. This approach can be contrasted with that of Shaykevitsh, who does not articulate a strong, alternative vision of Jewishness in America. Instead, when a father writes to a son who he has heard is contemplating conversion to Christianity, the best he has to offer as a deterrent is a Zionist argument: Jews are persecuted, but one day, when they have their own land, they will be as respected as other peoples.[54]

Parents and Children

The eastern European *brivnshteler* focused on providing words for parents anxious about their children's well-being—and occasionally for children rebelling against parental authority. In America, the first part of this equation was turned upside-down.

In Shaykevitsh's and Eisenstadt's *brivnshtelers*, family angst resurfaces in transoceanic correspondence, in which the predominant goal of the letter-writing children is to make their parents feel better. In the Eisenstadt letter cited earlier, Zusman Lipshits's first impressions of America are interspersed with expressions of love for his parents: The whole voyage, he says, he thought of his mother and father's "hot and boiling tears" and awaited the moment when he would finally be able to tell them he had arrived safely.[55] In Zusman's second letter, he writes that when he and his friends say *l'chaim*, they address it to "our warm and devoted families in Russia."[56] And he mentions a detail (perfect for soothing parental worry): He's boarding with a *landsman*.[57] There are, apparently, familiar aspects even to life in New York.

Shaykevitsh's letters between the newly arrived Leah and her parents also start with empathy and reassurance: "My letter should fly to you—I know what anxious thoughts are in your head."[58] Like Eisenstadt's Zusman, Leah lets her parents know that she is in familiar hands, picked up from Ellis Island, "the place where all immigrants from third class go now," by "a friend (or relative)"—the writer is apparently meant to insert the person's name—who found her a place to sleep. Her parents mustn't worry, because she will be fine; "like thousands of girls, [she'll] earn money."[59] The father reacts, true to European-Yiddish type,

by reiterating his anxieties, even though the cause is now past: "It was bad for me as a man, I could hide my pain in my heart, but as for your mother, don't even ask.…."[60]

Leah's next letter continues to assuage parental fears: "When you arrive in New York you see so many acquaintances from home you think you're still in the shtetl,"[61] she says, echoing the conceit in the second half of Sholem Aleichem's *Motl-Peyse dem khasns* (1907), where most of Motl's shtetl turns up in New York. Leah assures her parents that she will work—working here is no *shande* (shame)—and make money. Indeed, Leah, as cited earlier, writes a letter with a much darker picture of immigrant life. But that letter is intended for her girlfriend.

With initial letters out of the way, the parent-child correspondence in Shaykevitsh and Eisenstadt oscillates between connectedness and feared or actual abandonment. Connectedness is expressed through comforting news that marriages in the New World, even if contracted without a *shadkhn* (matchmaker), are with familiar types of people. Such is the case with Shaykevitsh's Bella, who announces that she's become a *kale* and wishes her parents a *mazel tov*. Who is the *khosn*? Nothing strange here—he's Lazar Grinblum from Bobroisk. Her parents can check out his family with their Bobroisk acquaintances, where they will find every qualification satisfied: Not only is Lazar's father a rabbi, but he was at one time (the past tense presumably necessary to explain the son's presence in America) a very wealthy man. Bella's parents can rejoice over their daughter's marriage, even though, as they are quick to point out, they will not be leading her to the *khupe* (marriage canopy).[62]

Money is a major theme of parent-child relations, just as it was a major push toward emigration. In his first letter home, Eisenstadt's Aleksander Gordon announces that he is putting aside half his "wages" (in English) for his parents as thanks for their devotion to his education and his future. In his second letter, he proudly encloses forty rubles and asks that they drink a glass of whiskey to his health.[63] Not all children are, or remain, so prompt to send money home. Shaykevitsh includes a letter from "an old father" whose Dovidl has forgotten him, does not write, and does not send money. The son is obliged to help his father, who is too weak to earn a living. Dovidl should not forget that he too will grow old.[64] Since old fathers in eastern Europe were unlikely to peruse a *brivnshteler* published in New York, we have to assume that Shaykevitsh either got carried away by his narrative or includes the father's story to prompt readers like Dovidl into ethical behavior.

In Shaykevitsh and Eisenstadt, parents worry about children's moral lives. Eisenstadt's Rokhl Rabinovits assures her father that even in "free America" (meant in this sense as libertine) she maintains her father's honor by only associating with the most honest and best people.[65] Shaykevitsh gives the fathers themselves a pair of letters. Following a pattern long established in eastern

European *brivnshtelers*, these fathers have heard from unnamed sources that their children have become wayward. Otherwise, the context has been Americanized. In the first letter, the son has not put aside money—not a single "cent"—even though he has been working for two years; a morality lesson follows about what happens when you go into debt.[66] In the second letter, Yitskhak Funk tells his *freylikhe* (carefree) daughter Reyzele that her parents' hearts are broken. A "trusted man" has seen her at "dances, masquerades, and picnics." But Funk goes to some lengths to establish his modernity. He "is not one of those people who say a girl should never talk to a man"; indeed "a woman has just as much right to get pleasure from the world as a man." However, young men have something else on their minds and can drag a girl "into the swamp."[67]

The single letter in Shaykevitsh that deals with child-rearing dispenses altogether with the usual eastern European Jewish emphasis on education. This letter is attributed to a grandmother responding to her daughter's complaints about "wild Yankele," who runs on roofs and fights in the street. Combining a grandmotherly Yiddish full of diminutives with an unexpectedly clear grasp of American conditions, Sonia asserts that a boy *has* to know how to fight, and to make him strong the parents should make sure he does gymnastic exercises. Serving as a mouthpiece for what we can assume are Shaykevitsh's ideas, she promotes modern child-rearing by opposing corporal punishment. Hitting a child, she says, only hardens him and makes him nervous.[68]

In Harkavy, parent-child relationships are almost entirely absent. The one grouping that includes them is a curiosity, because it links Harkavy, who usually draws his material from American letter-writers, with the Russian *pis'movnik* he was familiar with from his pre-emigration years.[69] Following Russian practice, the opening letters in Harkavy's family section consist of birthday and secular New Years' greetings from children to parents. The formality of these letters ("I consider it one of the principal duties of my life to express to you my filial veneration. Your birthday again offers me one of these opportunities"[70]) represents a striking contrast to the emotional overdrive of Shaykevitsh and Eisenstadt, as well as to European *brivnshtelers* as a group. More surprising still is the contrast with American birthday letters, which, though uncommon, are unfailingly affectionate and aim—insofar as possible in a letter-writer—for an air of spontaneity. As far as New Years' letters go, American letter-writers do not include them at all. The importance of January 1 as a time for sending formal congratulations was particular to Russian culture, and indeed, one of Harkavy's sets opens with the standard *pis'movnik* formula: "Dear Father, Not because it is customary, but because my heart prompts me…." [71]

Courtship Letters and Letters Between Husbands and Wives

While eastern European *brivnshtelers* include love letters between *khosn* and *kale*, they do not offer many letters that initiate the relationship. Here is where

Shaykevitsh, Eisenstadt, and Harkavy all step in, though the approaches they take to the matter are very different.

The *shadkhn*, a figure of derision even in eastern European *brivnshtelers,*[72] makes a defensive appearance in both Shaykevitsh and Eisenstadt. In Eisenstadt, the *shadkhn* is approached by a somewhat embarrassed client, a man who has met a young lady on his own but needs an intermediary to press his case because he lacks mutual acquaintances. He has heard of the *shadkhn* "by chance."[73] Shaykevitsh has two letters reimagining the role of the *shadkhn* in America. In the first, the *shadkhn* introduces himself to a potential in-law. After several paragraphs explaining the circuitous route through a variety of occupations that led him to his present profession, he proposes a match for the recipient's daughter.[74] In the second letter, this same *shadkhn*'s awareness of his own obsolescence is more marked. "It may be," he begins, "that you belong to the class of people that doesn't keep the old customs of getting married through a *shadkhn*." But, he goes on, what if a friend were to introduce you? How is the *shadkhn* any different? As we have seen earlier, Shaykevitsh is all for modernity, but he still sees a role for traditional Jewish values and customs in America, albeit in an updated form.[75]

Indeed, in letters that assume the involvement of a *shadkhn*, the strengths and weaknesses of potential matches are predictably traditional. In one letter, the prospective groom may be no beauty, but "he makes the best impression." He's a "cutter." He makes twenty-five dollars a week. He does not want the kind of girl who goes to picnics and dances and, presumably, is so concerned with her appearance that she "doesn't take off her corset even at night."[76] In the second letter, the potential *khosn*—who declares outright that he does not belong to that class of modern people who spurn the *shadkhn*—gives seven numbered conditions that the *kale* needs to fulfill. Among them: The lucky bride must be pretty, from a good family, able to cook and sew, and "not too educated." In addition, the groom hopes to be rich and give his wife all pleasures, but if it is God's will that he ends up poor, she'll have to put up with it.[77]

For those men who choose to seek their own matches, without the intermediary of a *shadkhn*, American *brivnshtelers* provide model letters with written declarations of love, while women get tips on how to draft responses that either accept the proposals or politely turn them down. The first declaration letter in Shaykevitsh addresses the American situation of falling in love with someone at work. He proposes beginning this way: "You might think, what kind of business does Herr [*space left blank*] have with me? Why is he writing me a letter? There are moments in a man's life, dear lady, when he is forced to speak his feelings."[78] Other letters express ardor through simile—the writer compares himself to a "fire-spitting mountain" [79]— or to Adam in the Garden of Eden, "who could not be happy until he caught sight of Eve."[80] A careful reader might, however, choose to avoid using the comparison with Adam, as it

backfires with the woman who receives that particular letter. One of Shomer's feisty female respondents, Eliza Gotfried, points out that Adam and Eve had no choice, while "you, dear Sir, aren't in a Garden of Eden and can find women who are prettier and better than I am."[81]

Harkavy's women would not think of availing themselves of a retort like that. His opening love letter has Joseph Marks referring to Miss Abrahams's "maidenly dignity," which precludes her from revealing what is in her heart. The suitor has been "received" at Miss Abrahams's house for more than a year now and "cannot endure suspense any longer."[82] As his life hangs in the balance, Miss Abrahams is provided with two options for reply. The positive response announces that she has already shown "his kind and manly letter" to her parents. In the negative one, the letter is again referred to as "kind and manly," but Miss Abrahams regrets that the sentiments expressed are, unfortunately, not reciprocated.[83]

If Mr. Marks and Miss Abrahams sound like well-heeled American Protestants, the reason may be their origins in an American letter-writer, where an identical set of letters is exchanged between Miss Rebecca Kingston and Mr. Fred Hill.[84] While Harkavy's point might only have been to provide Yiddish-speaking readers with genuine American prose, the result is a kind of alternate world in which people with Jewish names behave like WASPs. The one letter that breaks this pattern is labeled "from a young workman to his sweetheart."[85] The English in this letter, and correspondingly, the Yiddish translation, are much simpler than most of the other letters in *Harkavy's amerikanisher briefen-shteler*. While American manuals do provide an occasional love letter from a servant or a sailor, Harkavy's suitor in this letter has little in common with those stock characters. He records going with his beloved to the theater—definitely a pastime for working-class Jews. And instead of calling at her house or the home of her employer, he asks her to leave a note at his "lodgings": They will go to the park and talk about their future over coffee and cake.

A staple of letter-manual courtship is the problem of jealousy and "coldness." "Sir," writes Harkavy's Esther Goodman to Mr. Morris Cohen, "I was both shocked and surprised yesterday at seeing a letter from you to Miss Stone, written within the past week and making the most ardent protestations of undying love."[86] Following American preferences for brevity, Miss Goodman cancels the engagement in three paragraphs, each one sentence long. Engaged couples in Eisenstadt and Shaykevitsh also experience emotional turmoil, but at considerably greater length. In Eisenstadt, an exchange between Yakov Levinzohn and Lina Rozenblatt goes on for eight pages. He thinks she has been cold to him; she complains that he has said cruel things and has complicated her relationship with her cousins. She says that their souls are bound up together. He wants to see her the next day.[87]

While problems are permitted between engaged couples in American letter-writers, letters reflecting problems in marriage are out of bounds. Harkavy, not surprisingly, does not include any in his book. But for Shaykevitsh and Eisenstadt, the situation of wives in Russia writing to estranged American husbands becomes a source of high drama. Both writers supply intense outcries for the unhappy wives, replete with useful if banal metaphors. Shaykevitsh's Hinde Gutman, whose husband Anshel is rumored to have an American girlfriend, is "a withered flower, deprived of air and sun."[88] Eisenstadt's Sore Turman, who has not heard for quite a while from her husband Yoysef, about whom there are also rumors, writes "not with black ink but with the last drops of blood."[89]

More interesting, perhaps, than the women's complaints are the husbands' responses. Shaykevitsh provides two alternative replies for Anshel or someone in his position, depending on the writer's actual circumstances. The first begins, "Every word of your letter pierced my breast like a sharp knife"—a suggestion, common enough in *brivnshtelers*, that a good turn of phrase will bring the desired effect. The husband has not yet been able to set aside money in this alien world. But for him, she is not a withered flower, but "the freshest and most beautiful." The second letter reflects a situation in which the rumor of a girlfriend turns out to be true. In the apartment where he is boarding, the young and beautiful "missus" treated him very warmly, and he strayed. But his wife's words (again, the power of prose!) have pulled him out of his drunken stupor.[90]

Errant husbands seeking marital advice from Eisenstadt also have two letters to choose from. In the first, the husband professes his undying love and encloses five thousand dollars—every bit of his earnings since coming to America. In the alternative letter, the husband declares that he has tuberculosis and is off to a sanatorium in Colorado.[91] He may or may not be dying, but Eisenstadt has assuredly provided him with the last word.

Taken together, Harkavy, Shaykevitsh, and Eisenstadt provide a portrait of a messy but vibrant American Jewish community at the turn of the twentieth century. The fictional Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants depicted in their *brivnshtelers* grapple not only with the economic and social challenges of their early years in an alien land but also the long-term challenges of building individual lives, families, and communities in America. The letters in these *brivnshtelers* not only provided them with models for how to express to each other and to those back in Europe who they were and who they were becoming but also served as complementary, if not competing, visions of how to become American Jews.

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Notes

[1]For examples of this expression, see a model letter in Arn Dovid Bernshteyn, *Bernshteyn's nayer yudisher folks-briefenshteler* (Warsaw: Ya. kelter, n.d.), 64–65; and a real letter in Collection of Zimman Family, Letter 123/125, n.d., private collection.

[2]Y. Birnboym reports that the teaching of Yiddish letter-writing was introduced into the *kheyder* at the demand of parents who wanted their sons to learn this "everyday skill" in addition to *tanakh* and *gemore* ("Brivenshtelers" in *Dertsiyungs-entsiklopedye* Vol. 1, ed. H. Bass [New York: Congress for Jewish Culture, 1957], 468). He claims that *brivnshtelers* were used both in the classroom and by the girls' tutors. At least one introduction to a *brivnshteler* makes specific mention of this practice. Yoysef Arukh, the author, and himself a teacher of writing, addresses himself to his fellow teachers: "[The appearance of this book] will put a few noses out of joint… who would criticize? Only those whom it affects,… a teacher, for him it is a bad thing, despite the fact that with this *brifenshteller*, no teacher is needed, that's my idea, but can I really be angry at this sort? They must have their say, everyone needs to make a living, ach!" *Arukhs brifenshteller* (Kishinev: Yehezkl Litvak, 1892), 5.

[3]The letter-writing manual was a cross-European genre with a long history. In the Russian Empire and the United States, it gained increasing popularity beginning in the eighteenth century.

[4]These preliminary estimates are based on listings in the catalogs of the library of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, the New York Public Library, and the library of The Jewish Theological Seminary for *brivnshtelers* published in 1880–1914. Some are later editions of works published before 1880, and a few have anonymous authors. Included are any letter-writing manuals that contain Yiddish letters. There were also a number of Hebrew letter-writers published during the same period.

[5]For a discussion of the important role *brivnshtelers* played in the teaching of Yiddish writing and spelling in *kheyders* and other alternatives to crown schools in the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century, see Kh. Sh. Kazdan, *Fun kheyder un "shkoles" biz tsisho: dos ruslendishe yidentum in gerangl far shul, shprakh, kultur* (Mexico: n.p., 1956), 76–108.

[6]Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Collected Stories: A Friend of Kafka to Passions* (New York: The Library of America, 2004), 274.

[7]Shmuel Niger, *Sholem Aleikhem* (New York: Yidisher Kultur Ferlag, 1928), 217–226, as cited in Joseph Bar-El, "The Yiddish 'Briefenshteler' (Letter Writing Manual) of the 18th to the 20th Centuries," doctoral dissertation [Yiddish] (Jewish Teachers Seminary, 1970), 162–163.

[8]Other known American *brivnshtelers* include Frederick Warne, *Varn's folshtendiger Englisher-Yidisher briefenshteler und fershiedene gezeltslikhe formen fun fershiedene kontrakten* (New York: Y.L. Verbelavski, 1900); *Freynkel's English-Yudisher brifenshteler* (New York: M. Chinsky, 1901); Anonymous, *Briefenshteler in shraybshrift* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1905); P. Berliner, *Dr. Berliners moderner Yidisher brivnshteler* (New York: Star Publishing Company, 1926); and Abraham Steinberg, *Shtaynberg's brifenshteler* (New York: Star Publishing Company, 1926). The last two appear to be American editions of European *brivnshtelers* and the first two on the list, Yiddish translations of English-language letter-writers.

[9]See, for example, her citation from I.D.Berkowitz, Sholem Aleichem's son-in-law and translator: "I felt this was a great descent on my part, yet even so I fell upon the novels of Shomer with

a new hunger and swallowed them one after the other. Only to the yeshiva I did not bring them—I was ashamed in front of my friends." Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Jewish Society*, trans. Saadya Sternberg (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 127. On Shomer, see also Sophie Grace-Pollak, "Shomer l'or shomers mispet l'Sholom Aleikhem," *Khulyot: Journal of Yiddish Research*, no. 5 (Winter 1998): 125–159, and "Shomer ha-publitsist," *Khulyot,* no. 9 (Summer 2005): 161–195; Alyssa Quint, "Yiddish Literature for the Masses?: A Reconsideration of Who Read What in Jewish Eastern Europe," *AJS Review* 29, no.1 (April 2005): 61–89; and Eric Goldstein, "Pop'em in Yiddish: The subterranean world of Jewish pulp fiction," in *Guilt and Pleasure,* http://www.guiltandpleasure.com/index.php?site=rebootgp&page=gp_article&id=248 (accessed 23 October 2009).

[10]See Arthur A. Goren, *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 30–33.

[11]N.M. Shaykevitsh, *Shaykevitsh'es nayer briefenshteler* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1915), 185. Shaykevitsh also had two *brivnshtelers* published in the Russian Empire, though he wrote them in New York: *Shomer's briefenshteler* (Vilna: The Widow and Brothers Romm, 1898) and *Der nayer Shomer's briefenshteler* (Vilna: Farlag fun Kh. M., 1908). The latter, published after his death, may be a later edition of a previously published *brivnshteler.*

[12]Dovid Katz, "Alexander Harkavy and His Trilingual Dictionary" in *Yiddish-English-Hebrew Dictionary*, ed. Alexander Harkavy (New York: YIVO and Schocken Books, 1988), x–xi. In his own introduction to this dictionary, Harkavy is explicit about documenting "the living language of the people" (xiii). This was, clearly, not his aim in the *brivnshteler*—or perhaps it was, if "living language" is understood as English, and its source is the language of American letter-writers. Harkavy's autobiography (*Perakim me-hayai* [New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1935]) casts no light on this matter, as his focus is his life before emigration and his first American job as a farmhand in upstate New York.

[13]Zalman Reisen, *Leksikon fun der Yidisher literatur, prese un filologye* Vol. 1 (Vilna: B. Kletskin, 1927), 65. Among Eisenstadt's Hebrew works are *Rebe Kalonimus Ze'ev Visotski* (New York, 1905); *Otsar ha-temunot: kolel me'ah va-hamishim temunot shel gedole 'amernu* (New York, 1909); and *Anshe ha-shem be-Artsot ha-berit: sefer zikaron le-rashe alfe Yisra'el* (St. Louis: Moyneshter Press, 1933).

[14]In the introduction to L.W. Sheldon, *Sheldon's Twentieth century letter writer: an up-to-date and accurate guide to correct modern letter writing* (Philadelphia, D. McKay, 1901), the reader is advised "to state one's desires in as few words as possible—to couch them in polite, grammatical language—to write them legibly with all due regard for courteousness without 'toadyism,' respect without effusiveness." http://digital.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/t/text/text-idx?idno=00a13 8205m;view=toc;c=nietz (accessed 21 October 2009). In *The Complete Letter Writer and Book of Social Forms* (Chicago: Frederick J. Drake, 1902), which can be accessed at http://www.vintage-ebooks.com/LetterWriter.htm (accessed 23 October 2009), editor Charles Walter Brown labels the "chief requisites of a letter" as "clearness, explicitness, and conciseness"(3) and continues, "Generally it is best that the purpose of the letter should appear in its earlier portions: that is, the most important part of the letter should come first, that which is less important coming next"(4). Compare Harkavy's opening words, "In writing a letter, one should have a clear idea of the points one wishes to make, and these points must have a proper order. The more important should come earlier, and the less important things must come later" (Harkavy 1902/1999), 1.

[15]From the title page of *Shaykevitsh'es nayer briefenshteler*: "A complete guide for all classes of people. A proper manual in the art of how to write all sorts of letters for whatever takes place in life." In the foreword to Benzion Eisenstadt's *Der moderner brieffenshteller* (Brooklyn: M. Shapiro, 1910), he promises readers letters suitable "for all the different aspects of life, which can prove useful for everyone and for different occasions." Both the promise to serve "all classes" of people, and the claim of a wide selection of model letters were standard elements in the front matter of *brivnshtelers* of the late nineteenth to early twentieth century.

[16]Eisenstadt, 38–42. The bizarre change in the statue's gender no doubt can be explained by the fact that *malakh*, the word for angel in Hebrew, is masculine in gender.

[17]Shaykevitsh, 59–60. Descriptions of voyages and arrivals in America were not unique to *brivnshtelers*, as attested to by a cycle of letters from J.C., an Irish immigrant in *The Lady's Letter-Writer* (New York: J. Ivers and Co., 1902), 106–107. J.C., newly arrived from Dublin, writes to her siblings that she has had a similarly harrowing voyage but that she too has arrived safely.

[18]Shaykevitsh, 167–172.

[19]Ibid., 65–66.

[20]Eisenstadt, 121–122.

[21]Shaykevitsh, 61–62.

[22]Eisenstadt, 68–69.

[23]Ibid., 69–71.

[24]Ibid., 118–120.

[25]Shaykevitsh, 61–64. Immigrant delight in egalitarianism is also evident from the previously cited model letters from the Irish immigrant woman J.C. in *The Lady's Letter-Writer*, 109: "So far I like New York very much, there is not that reserve or clanship in society so noticeable at home, each one considers himself on an equality with his fellow-creatures, and all seem influenced by a spirit of freedom." Real Jewish immigrant letters also sometimes comment on this. For more on this topic, see Alice Nakhimovsky and Roberta Newman, "A paper life: model letters and real letters as a key to Russian-Jewish aspirations at the turn of the twentieth century," paper presented at Jews in the East European Borderlands: Daily Life, Violence, and Memory conference, Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 19–20 April 2009. This paper also appears in Yiddish, in abbreviated form in *Forverts* (26 June 2009): 12–13.

[26]In Abraham Steinberg's *Shtaynberg's brifenshteler* (New York: Star Hebrew Book Company, 1926), 42–44, Zalman, in America for eighteen years, tries to get his brother Volf in Russia to pack up and leave. Both brothers are united in the feeling that American freedom is good for the Jews and that Jewish life in Russia is dreadful. The book is an anomaly and a bit of a mystery because it is published in New York, but, aside from this set of letters, it seems to have only European content.

[27]See Nakhimovsky and Newman. Shaykevitsh's European *brivnshtelers* are also markedly pro-American compared to others published in the Russian Empire. The authors of European *brivnshtelers* may have drawn inspiration for their negative portrayals of America not primarily from letters sent home by immigrants but from the Jewish press. See Judith Zabarenko, "The Negative Image of America in the Russian-Language Jewish Press, 1881–1910," *American Jewish History* 75, no. 3 (March 1986): 267–279.

[28]The anonymously authored *Briefenshteler in shraybshrift* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1905) does include one letter from a man who intends to return home to his wife in the shtetl after the "busy season" is over in New York (65–67). While it is estimated that as many as 20 percent of Jewish immigrants before 1905 returned to eastern Europe, this percentage fell to 5–8 percent after 1905 (Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880–1920* [Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992], 249–250, n. 2). See also Jonathan Sarna, "The Myth of No Return: Jewish Return Migration to Eastern Europe, 1881–1914," *American Jewish History* 71, no. 2 (December 1981): 256–268. The seventy-seven Yiddish letters from Jewish immigrants in Josephine Wtulich's *Writing Home: Immigrants in Brazil and the United States, 1890–1891* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1986) includes only one letter that makes direct reference to a Jew who has returned to Europe, though most writers, especially the newly arrived, express all sorts of ambivalence about American life, as well as varying levels of homesickness.

[29]Harkavy does deal with the immigration experience in his *Der Englisher lehr-bukh* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1900?), an English phrase book for Yiddish-speakers. The

book takes the reader every step of the way through the immigration process, from the trip over ("I feel very weak and must vomit now") to arrival at Ellis Island ("Will we be searched when landing?") to filling one's most immediate needs upon release from immigration ("Can I lodge here?… This room is too dark for me, show me a brighter one").

[30]Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870–1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 52. Gerald Sorin asserts that in 1897 more than 60 percent of the Jewish workforce in New York was employed in the garment industry (*A Time for Building*, 74).

[31]The one exception is a courtship letter from a "young workman" in *Harkavy's amerikanisher briefen-shteler* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1902), 151. His *Der Englisher lehr-bukh* is practical about supplying English phrases particularly useful to the businesses in which immigrants were likely to be engaged. In a chapter called "Buying and Selling," Harkavy teaches Yiddish-speakers selling unspecified items—perhaps from a pushcart—how to *handl* (bargain) in English: "I sell them [*sic*] 75 cents"… "Sir, I cannot sell them any cheaper" (76).

[32]*Harkavy's amerikanisher briefen-shteler*, 79.

[33]Eisenstadt, 23.

[34]Ibid., 24.

[35]A few of the English letters in Harkavy and the 1901 *Freynkel's English-Yudisher brifenshteler* are identical, and all of the letters in the latter appear to have been copied verbatim from existing American letter-writers and then translated into Yiddish. For instance, Freynkl includes and translates into Yiddish without any changes whatsoever a letter from Oliver Brooks to his mother, looking forward to vacation from school, when he will "enjoy the celebration of the Christmas festivities in the old-fashioned manner" (62–63).

[36]Eisenstadt, 29–31.

[37]Shaykevitsh, 85.

[38]Psalm 69:1.

[39]Isaiah 40:3.

[40]Shaykevitsh, 104–106.

[41]Eisenstadt, 22.

[42]Shaykevitsh, 40–41; 120–122.

[43]Ibid., 172–174. In this letter, Shaykevitsh makes oblique reference to his own vilification at the hands of critics. All good Yiddish writers earn a lot of money and live very well, he says, but this was not the case ten years earlier, when Yiddish writers had nothing to eat "so they ate each other," attacking the "few writers who were fortunate enough to be earning enough for a piece of bread."

[44]Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880–1950* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 4.

[45]Eisenstadt, 124–125.

[46]Ibid., 50–51. It is worth noting that Fink does not claim that he goes daily to *daven* at the synagogue, only that he does so on *Shabbos* and holidays.

[47]One exception to this rule is a letter in a *brivnshteler* by Aaron David Bernstein, from a man who has been granted the privilege of living in a Russian city outside the Pale of Settlement: "There is no Jewish atmosphere here, no Jewish street and Jewish population, which in the end is dear and beloved to me. There are a few Jewish families here, residents, but these Jews can't compare with our Jews in G. Maybe they are Jews in their hearts, but in their appearance, in their languages, and the way they live, they are true Russians. And this alone alienates me from them." *Bernshteyn's nayer yudisher folks-briefenshteler* (Warsaw: Ya. Kelter, n.d.), 121–122. Another rare example in a European *brivnshteler* of concern with religious backsliding is a letter from a young man studying in Vienna. Because he was pious and resisted the temptation to go to the theater, he avoided a fire that broke out there (a real event in 1881, which killed 650); his friend,

who lacked such scruples, was killed. (H. Poliak-Gilman, *Der nayer obraztsover brifenshteller* [Berditshev: Yoysef Berman, 1904], 17–19).

[48]Eisenstadt, 99–103.

[49]Ibid., 103–105.

[50]Ibid., 127–128. Given the previously cited joke involving Boris Thomashefsky and Jacob Adler, it seems safe to assume that the use of the name "Harkavy" and "Alexander" and the mention of "three languages" is some kind of dig at Alexander Harkavy, whose own *brivnshteler* had already appeared in several editions by 1910, the year of *Der moderner briffenshteller's* publication.

[51]Eisenstadt is also the author of a few compilations of bar mitzvah speeches. Joselit writes extensively in *The Wonders of America* (89–110) about the new prominence the bar mitzvah ceremony and celebration assumed in American Jewish life. Mentions of bar mitzvahs are practically nonexistent in European *brivnshtelers*. A rare example is a pair of letters in which the writers express their regrets that they are unable to attend their relatives' bar mitzvah ceremonies (A. Miller, *Miller's nayer brifenshteller in tsvey theyl* [Piotrkow: Shloyme Belkhotovski, 1911]).

[52]Eisenstadt, 136–138.

[53]Ibid., 139–142.

[54]Shaykevitsh, 161–165.

[55]Eisenstadt, 39.

[56]Ibid., 41.

[57]Ibid., 42.

[58]Shaykevitsh, 54–55.

[59]Ibid., 56.

[60]Ibid., 57.

[61]Ibid., 59.

[62]Ibid., 70–75.

[63]Eisenstadt, 43–46.

[64]Shaykevitsh, 122–123.

[65]Eisenstadt, 52.

[66]Shaykevitsh, 113–115.

[67]Ibid., 116–118.

[68]Ibid., 118–121.

[69]Harkavy himself wrote a *pis'movnik, Angliskii pis'movnik dlia russkikh* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1917). The letters are similar (and sometimes identical) to those in his *brivnshteler*, though there are more that refer to social occasions among adults. Some names are American, some Russian, and some Jewish.

[70]Harkavy, 107.

[71]Here is an example from a *pis'movnik* intended for Russian-Americans: "It is not the New Year alone that makes me express to you my indebtedness and gratitude. It always abides in my heart as sincere filial affection." (*Novyi russkii pis'movnik" v" 5 otdielakh" spetsīal'no prisposoblennyi dlia Russkikh, zhivushchikh" v" Amerike* [1900s, 16].

[72]For a striking example of this, see Max Weinreich, "Levin Lion Dors *brivn-shtelers*," *YIVO Bleter* 18 (1941): 109–112.

[73]Eisenstadt, 80–83.

[74]Shaykevitsh, 108–110.

[75]Ibid., 110–111.

[76]Ibid., 108–109.

[77]Ibid., 112–113.

[78]Ibid., 124.

[79]Ibid., 130.

[80]Ibid., 126–127.

[81]Ibid., 129.

[82]Harkavy, 138–139.

[83]Ibid., 140–141.

[84]The first two letters (though not the third) appear verbatim in *Brown's Complete Letter-Writer*, 142. Since Harkavy and Brown both appeared in 1902, the likely original source for all three letters is another, earlier American letter-writer.

[85]Harkavy, 150–151.

[86]Ibid., 156–157.

[87]Eisenstadt, 92–98.

[88]Shaykevitsh, 76–77.

[89]Eisenstadt, 61.

[90]Shaykevitsh, 80–81.

[91]Eisenstadt, 62–66.

Commissioner Williams and the Jews

Naomi W. Cohen

The saga of the east European Jewish immigration to the United States from the 1880s to World War I has been told and retold. Some historians have also included the experiences of those immigrants who disembarked at Ellis Island. Alan Kraut, for example, relates in detail each step of the new arrival as he proceeded from one medical examination to another; Thomas Pitkin describes the right of the immigrant, who faced deportation for any reason, to appeal his case to a board of inquiry. More recently, Amy Fairchild's book, *Science at the Borders*, offers a novel interpretation by considering the medical inspection and the immigrant's admission or rejection as functions of America's expanding economy and the need to regulate the correspondingly expanding class of industrial labor.[1] Nor has William Williams, the commissioner of immigration at Ellis Island at a time when officials there were coping daily with hundreds and even thousands of immigrants,[2] escaped mention. Williams, who served one term under Theodore Roosevelt and another under William Howard Taft, incurred the fear and dislike of Jews during his tenure. But, since none of the accounts fully analyzes the reaction of American Jews to the plight of the Jewish immigrant on Ellis Island during those years, this essay attempts to fill some lacunae. It will focus primarily on the effect of Williams's policies on immigrant Jews, Max J. Kohler's defense of the new arrivals, and Congressional and executive hearings on policy at Ellis Island. It will also consider the question of whether Williams was an antisemite.

Connecticut-born Williams studied at Yale and received a law degree from Harvard. His Wall Street law practice was interrupted by two government assignments. At age thirty he served as counsel in the arbitration case of a dispute between the United States and Britain, and several years later he was an officer in the Spanish-American War. Independently wealthy, he, like Roosevelt and Taft, shared the tastes and prejudices of the Republican patrician class. Roosevelt appointed him commissioner of immigration at Ellis Island in 1902, a post that he held until 1905; Taft reappointed him in 1909, and he served until Woodrow Wilson assumed office four years later.[3] Empowered to interpret and administer immigration regulations, Williams was the ultimate authority at the port that received most immigrants. Whereas other speakers for the Protestant Establishment and the "first families" expressed their antipathy to immigrants through the legislation they supported, the offices they filled, the officials they knew, and the groups they organized, Williams was one who actually dealt daily with the newcomers. Just as his experiences as commissioner at Ellis Island were nurtured by his prejudices as an upper-class Republican and an immigration restrictionist, so in his eyes were his prejudices vindicated by his experiences.

Williams, a champion of immigration restriction, never hid his views. He stated openly at the time of his appointment that aliens had "no inherent right… to come here" and that America should take action, however drastic, to exclude all below a certain physical and economic standard. Indeed, the exclusion of "undesirable" aliens or races became his virtual obsession. At times Jewish critics called him antisemitic; most "undesirable" ethnic minorities and their press that defended unrestricted immigration saw him as an enemy. As a witness who once testified against him pointedly asked, why would a well-established multimillionaire "clamor to have the unpleasant job on Ellis Island… unless he wants to keep out the foreigners as much as possible?"[4] Williams's first order to his staff, however, directed them to treat immigrants with "kindness and decency."[5]

A zealous worker, Williams set out to improve the physical plant under his jurisdiction and, as the president had instructed, to uproot the fraud and corruption that existed at the depot under his predecessor. Roosevelt cautioned the new commissioner to avoid antagonizing the ethnic societies that complained about the boards of inquiry, but Williams, who was quick to answer all verbal and written criticism, defended his practices and suggested to Roosevelt that the attacks were motivated by a desire to embarrass the president politically. Moreover, he charged that the ethnic societies attacked the immigration authorities when their own business interests were involved. Those societies that agreed with him, he said, "are of the opinion, and so am I, that the rights of the immigrants already are, and since I took office have always been, scrupulously guarded." Roosevelt appointed an investigative commission to hear the ethnics' charges against Williams, but its report mostly upheld the commissioner's actions.[6]

Williams harbored a particular aversion to the "new" immigration, or the waves that arrived from southern and eastern Europe—the Poles, Italians, Jews—after 1880. He approved of the "old" immigration, but he posited the "inferior" character of the later arrivals and their harmful effect on the country. Publicly airing his racist views, he spoke of the "constantly deteriorating quality of the recent immigration." Although he did not ask for the exclusion of all new immigrants, he feared that too many undesirables were gaining entry. He insisted, therefore, not only on full compliance with the letter of the law, which he construed narrowly, but he looked for ways of raising the barriers against the so-called undesirables. Deportation was a favorite weapon. If would-be immigrants were not deterred by the law itself, Williams reasoned, increasing the number of deportees by a stricter reading of the law might well dissuade them. He also advocated the literacy test, a device that restrictionists increasingly favored.[7] Williams's views of the undesirables did not antagonize the president. Indeed, Roosevelt, who welcomed the votes of the new immigrants, also believed in "superior" and "inferior" races. He was, however, more optimistic than

Williams. As Gary Gerstle has suggested, he thought that most races could be brought together and forged into a new and stronger American race.[8]

The commissioner explained his stand in a talk to Princeton students in 1904. Focusing on new immigrants such as the Italians, Poles, and Jews, he described them as urban groups that built their "colonies" in the cities. Those colonies, he said, "tend to perpetuate amongst the immigrants that ignorance of our laws, customs and political ideas which is one of their great dangers." In his bleak picture he wasted no sympathy on the persecuted, nor did he acknowledge that the American city in those years was the new economic frontier, a magnet that drew rural native-born Americans as well as immigrants. Unlike the old immigrants, he said, a high percentage of the newcomers were assisted by others or were stimulated to cross the Atlantic by the often-fraudulent methods of steamship companies. The result was the arrival of thousands from "degraded classes," irrespective of their physical or mental conditions. Not surprisingly, many were unsuited to support themselves and thereby compounded the number and problems of America's poor. He added that even the Jews, a "very charitable people" who largely took care of their own, admitted that poverty—and here he quoted from a recent report of the United Hebrew Charities—was dramatically increasing in their community because of the immigrants. Since the lands from which the immigrants came were only too delighted to be rid of their "riff-raff or poorer elements," he concluded that America's only defense against the undesirables was self-defense.[9]

American Jews watched Williams and his policies apprehensively, since the new immigrants under attack included a seemingly endless flow of Jews from eastern Europe. As the condition of the latter continued to deteriorate at the turn of the century—an amalgam of socioeconomic hardships and physical persecution—the need to preserve a haven of opportunity and refuge for their fellow Jews became paramount. Although the right of asylum in the United States for fugitives from, say, pogroms, differed from the need to immigrate for economic reasons, most Jews who spoke out on behalf of the foreigners asked for both. To be sure, American Jews were ambivalent about the immigration of the Russian émigrés and not all consistently favored unrestricted entry; but the welfare of the oppressed united Jews of all classes: Reform and traditionalist, "uptown" (i.e., the established and acculturated element, primarily of German extraction) and "downtown" (the more recent arrivals, usually designated as Russians). Serious differences in manners and mores still separated the Germans from the Russians, and hints of rivalry between the two strata over leadership of the community figured into their responses to immigration, but common efforts on behalf of the eastern immigrants usually overshadowed the divisiveness. The leaders of pro-immigration societies, such as the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), employed various weapons in defense of immigration. They lobbied legislators

against restrictive laws and voted for anti-restriction candidates; they touted the immigrants' virtues in public speeches and printed articles; they weighed the advantages of alliances with other ethnic groups; and they maintained strict surveillance over federal immigration law and procedures.[10] Given the growing popular clamor for restrictive legislation, Jews, always a hyper-accommodationist minority, worried at times lest their posture made them out of step with their fellow Americans.

Williams took special note of the Jews on several occasions. He told Roosevelt at the time of the president's investigative commission that the charges against him, which had been brought by the German press, included items on anti-Jewish discrimination and were picked up by several Jewish organizations. Williams kept lists of relief-seeking new arrivals, which were tabulated by nationality, and he reported that in the second half of 1904, Jews had led the rest with 62 out of 259 relief applicants.[11] More interesting was an inquiry he ordered to determine whether one Jewish individual had had his passage paid by an organization in Europe. The facts uncovered by Williams's agent are not of special interest, but the number of hours and amount of energy spent on that specific case, as well as the agent's antisemitic report, are. The agent conducted eight interviews, which required him to travel from place to place in Manhattan—three interviews with the immigrant, two with the immigrant's uncle, one with the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and two with Yiddish newspapers. The agent's report to Williams was highly unflattering to the particular immigrant and to Jews generally. Not only did he accuse Jews of lying, deception, and shirking military service in Russia, but he hinted at a virtual Jewish conspiracy, whose tentacles spread from Russia to Berlin to New York. The purpose of that network, he explained, was to sneak undesirable Russian Jews into the United States.[12]

When Williams took office, the important regulatory statute that dealt with undesirable immigrants was that of 1882. Denying entry to paupers, felons, and persons mentally or physically ill, the law included the famous LPC, or "likely-to-become-a-public-charge," clause. Roughly defined, LPC meant potential paupers, or those without jobs awaiting them or friends or relatives prepared to support them. It also excluded persons whose passage was paid for by others or who received assistance for immigration. Escape clauses provided that if the individual could prove before a board of inquiry that he or she did not belong to any of the specifically excluded classes, an assisted immigrant or one sent for by a relative or friend could gain entry. (The clause on assistance from relatives and friends, which somewhat alleviated the immigrant's hardships, was eliminated in a 1907 law.) The decisions of the boards of inquiry could be appealed to the commissioners and even to the Department of Commerce and Labor, which housed the Immigration Bureau, but the sheer volume of appeals elicited only cursory attention in Washington. Since those who interpreted and

administered the law made the final judgment, the fate of the immigrants at Ellis Island rested in the hands of the faceless immigrant inspectors and Williams.[13] The unlucky immigrants faced deportation, a prospect more daunting to Jews than to others, for in contrast to the average German or Italian deportee, the Jew often returned to rampant persecution.

The LPC clause above all irritated Jewish defenders. American communal stewards, usually the established Jews, cooperated with their European counterparts to facilitate the uprooting and transplanting of the east Europeans. Both old and new agencies under their direction provided relief for the refugees on their arrival. At the same time, the new immigrants who found employment immediately earmarked part of their meager earnings to pay the passage of relatives and friends still trapped in Europe. That type of assistance could legitimately raise the questions of whether the help was legal and whether those assisted were likely to become paupers or public charges. To reduce the potential number of rejections, the stewards urged the relief networks in Europe to weed out any undesirables bound for America.[14] They also pleaded with American government officials to maintain a lenient interpretation of the LPC clause that would allow the entry of those merely in need of an initial boost.

Bent on tightening up restriction, Williams used the weapons at his disposal. If Congress failed to enact harsher measures, he could circumvent the legislature by administrative, or executive, action. He was responsible only to the commissioner-general of immigration and the secretary of the Department of Commerce and Labor, and since he maintained strict control over his staff—men, he claimed, who were intelligent and hard working—he could rely on their compliance. One of his early orders required immigrants to show that they had at least ten dollars in their possession in addition to tickets for their destination. He was merely interpreting the LPC clause, Williams said. Protests against the order reached Washington, and Secretary of Commerce and Labor Charles Nagel forced Williams to give way. But although the sum demanded was no longer officially specified, the principle remained, and inspectors, doubtless desiring to impress Williams, still abided by it.[15]

Williams's critics were most incensed by his reliance on the boards of inquiry to justify orders for deportation. Immigrants who appealed the order did not know the evidence against them, nor did they have the right of counsel at the hearing. Often the language barrier precluded their understanding of the proceedings. Williams had assured Roosevelt when the latter had ordered an investigation that a representative of a reputable ethnic society could be present and that no charitable organization could charge that the immigrant faced "star chamber" (secret and arbitrary) methods. Nor was the foreigner denied the right to appeal a board's decision.[16] Williams's Jewish opponents may have expected contradictory reports from Philip Cowen, publisher of the *American Hebrew* and friend of the stewards. Cowen held the office of an immigrant inspector

and was privy to the commissioner's policies and the sensitive issue of deportation. Cowen's accounts, however, were mild and circumspect. In an early report to prominent Jews of New York, Cowen discussed the hardships imposed by interpretations of the LPC clause and the prohibition by the medical division of those with a "poor physique." He told them of his aid to several Jews who had been excluded, how he would have evaluated the cases, and the reputation he had gained as friend of the Jews. Despite the ethnics' criticism of the boards of inquiry, Cowen, at least in writing, had little to condemn on that score. The regular board members were "all right," he said, but questionable decisions came from those called on to fill vacancies. Cowen suggested that Jewish work at the port, then handled by three agencies—United Hebrew Charities, Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society, and the National Council of Jewish Women—be coordinated to enhance their effectiveness, and that American Jews counter the "pernicious" proselytizing from Christian missionaries.[17] On another occasion Cowen reported to government officials on behalf of the Jews. He had made a detailed survey of Jewish charitable and penal institutions and amassed considerable data on their work with recent immigrants. Since his numbers differed markedly from the inflated figures used by the Bureau of Immigration, he offered them as proof that the LPC clause had frequently been misused in cases of Jewish aliens. Jews scrupulously obeyed the immigration laws, he insisted, and reports that magnified their undesirability only aided the restrictionists.[18] In sum, the material indicates that instead of indicting Williams for antisemitic policies, Cowen, at least in writing, provided no specific proof that the commissioner was animated by Jew-hatred.

Williams was not silent even when out of office. In 1906 he twice delivered a lengthy paper titled, "The New Immigration: Some Unfavorable Features and Possible Remedies."[19] Sounding as if he were still under attack, he began with the following statement: "I have as little sympathy with those who would curtail all immigration as I have with those who would admit all intending immigrants, good, bad, or indifferent." But, he continued, since a significant portion of the current immigration was undesirable, their entry must be prevented. He denied that the distribution of immigrants to areas relatively underpopulated—a device incorporated by Jewish leaders in their Industrial Removal Office and Jacob Schiff's Galveston Plan,[20] projects of which Williams doubtless knew—would solve the mass immigration bound for the cities. As in the address of 1904, he elaborated on the faults of the new immigrants, the dangers of artificially stimulated immigration, and the social burdens imposed by immigrant-generated poverty. Williams's overall solution was to tighten the LPC clause and other restrictions, particularly on steamship carriers. And, since so many of the southern and eastern European undesirables were illiterate, he pushed for the imposition of a literacy test. He realized the difficulties in administering such laws, he said, but nonetheless they must be in place.

Sounding very much the racist, Willliams unabashedly concluded with a dire warning on the danger of unrestricted immigration. Not only were many of the new immigrants unlikely to become assimilated, but their inferior racial character would ultimately have harmful effects on the future of America:

> We owe our present civilization and standing amongst nations chiefly to people of a type widely different… . The wildest enthusiast on the subject of unrestricted immigration would hardly claim that the United States could be socially, politically or industrially what it is to-day had it been peopled exclusively by the races of Russia, Austria and Southern Italy, and particularly from the poorer elements of such races, which races, furthermore, have failed to place their own countries in the front rank of nations.

If millions more of the new immigrants sought to enter the country, he argued, the only recourse would lie in restrictive measures "far more radical" than any heretofore suggested. Admittedly, America had benefited from "good" immigration, but, "Charity begins at home.… However deep our sympathy may be for the oppressed of other countries, it should not stand in the way of our legislating primarily in the interest of our own people." The commissioner's challenge to the defenders of free immigration was clear: Which is your choice, to aid the victims of persecution who are forced to flee their countries or to defend the best interests of the United States?

Jewish representatives were temporarily relieved by two appointments during Roosevelt's second term in office: that of Robert Watchorn to replace Williams and that of Oscar Straus to head the Department of Commerce and Labor. Watchorn, unlike his predecessor, sympathized with the immigrants, and he quickly repealed one of Williams's last orders, i.e., the imposition of a ten-dollar tax on the entry of all new arrivals. Straus, the first Jew to serve in the cabinet, was an outspoken advocate of unrestricted immigration; his stand annoyed restrictionists, especially since the Bureau of Immigration was then housed in his department. The powerful senator of Massachusetts, Henry Cabot Lodge, a friend of Roosevelt and closely allied to the patrician-led Immigration Restriction League (IRL), complained to Roosevelt that Straus opposed restrictions on the entry of "poor Jews," but without proof the president dropped the matter.[21]

When he was reappointed commissioner at Ellis Island in 1909, Williams pressed for additional legal regulations on immigration. He explained that the categories that Congress specifically excluded were minimal: "Even… strict exclusion makes it possible to keep out only what may be termed 'scum,' or the very worst elements that seek to come here." He announced a policy of rigid regulation enforcement, with the recommendation that new arrivals have at least twenty-five dollars in their possession, in addition to a railroad ticket to a final destination. That recommendation, which the lower-ranking inspectors

interpreted as an order, attested to his determination to weed out paupers and those falling under the LPC clause.[22] The new policy affected both Jewish and non-Jewish aliens, but unlike during Williams's first term, some concerned Jews now took the initiative and fought back. Set against the backdrop of those years—when Jews grappled with the restrictionist Dillingham Commission on Immigration, when they challenged Russian restrictions on the entry and business activities of American Jews, and when many victims of that decade's pogroms added to the normal influx—the fact that they stretched their energies and resources to combat the procedures on Ellis Island is all the more noteworthy.

In July 1909, Max Kohler and Abram Elkus, representing the UAHC and the newly organized AJC, drew up a legal brief, "In the Matter of Hersh Skuratowski," which argued on behalf of four Russian Jews whose deportation had been ordered by a board of inquiry. The reason given was that they could not produce twenty-five dollars on their arrival. The brief charged that Williams had exceeded his powers by requiring the fee, first, because he was usurping a legislative power and second, because Congress had not required a fee of the immigrants. The brief also contended that the immigrants had been denied a fair hearing before the board of inquiry, an administrative rather than judicial body, thus abridging their right to due process of the law. The case was scheduled to be heard in a federal court, but meantime the board of inquiry granted the aggrieved parties a rehearing and rescinded the deportation order. The four Jews were spared, and since the constitutional question was now moot, a chance for a judicial ruling on assisted immigration and the boards of inquiry was lost. Kohler and Elkus were invited, however, to submit the brief and a list of suggested reforms to Secretary Nagel.[23]

The Skuratowski brief reflected the public face of German Jewish leaders like Kohler and Elkus. Kohler, a lawyer and amateur historian, was a Jewish patrician whose father and maternal grandfather were luminaries in the world of Reform Judaism. As a young federal assistant district attorney, Kohler developed a keen interest in the rights of Chinese immigrants and other aliens. In short order he became the watchdog of immigrants' rights. He diligently collected facts and statistics on the abuses of the boards of inquiry and deportation proceedings, and he wrote and spoke on the issue. Unlike his colleagues, he was the constitutional expert who contended that due process of law, as well as treaties and statutory law, protected aliens from arbitrary administrative proceedings that threatened their right to enter and remain in the United States. To Kohler it was the sanctity of law that fueled his attack on Williams. True, he and his circle were no more enamored of the Russian Jews than the restrictionists, nor were they oblivious to the social problems spawned by the mass immigration. They knew, too, that the racist charges against the "inferior" Jew besmirched the acculturated and Americanized Jews as well. But even as they attempted

privately to combat the entry of "undesirables" and to instruct the new arrivals on "proper" American behavior, they defended the immigrants to government officials and to the public. Since the Jewish condition in eastern Europe showed little sign of improvement, their overriding concern was to keep American doors open to the Russians.[24]

The ethnic press and immigrant aid societies' ongoing vilification of Williams and his policies continued unabated.[25] As the following episode illustrates, established American Jews attempted to moderate the agitation of the new immigrants. In 1910 Williams attended the annual meeting of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society (HSIAS), at which the influential banker and philanthropist, Jacob Schiff, was the principal speaker. Seeking to mollify Williams but understanding the sentiments of the immigrant audience, Schiff chose his words judiciously. He lavished praise on the Russian immigrants, who helped make New York "a great commercial emporium," but he totally ignored the issue of deportation under the LPC clause. Agreeing that New York City could no longer absorb the stream of Jewish immigrants comfortably, he stressed the need to deflect them to ports such as Galveston—a ploy both to garner support for his Galveston project and to limit the number facing the hardships of Ellis Island. The banker signaled the audience to applaud Williams warmly, and they did, at least out of deference to Schiff. Williams reciprocated by calling Jewish immigrants "promising citizens." He could not, however, resist a favorite taunt: Too many of them could not speak English after four or five years in the country, meaning that "they haven't absorbed our American spirit and haven't learned about our American institutions." That a good portion of the audience did not understand his words doubtless prevented any serious disruption; only Abram Elkus, a defender of the new arrivals, interjected a sharp retort. When the next speaker delivered his address in Yiddish, Williams suspected (wrongly) that he was being criticized. In the end, despite Schiff's attempts to maintain harmony, the meeting failed to soften the animosity between the commissioner and the Jews.[26]

Established American Jews acted singly or through organizations. The UAHC had long been concerned with the issue of Russian immigration, and since its inception in 1906 the AJC had dealt with the specter of immigration restriction. Those two agencies took little part, however, in the National Liberal Immigration League (NLIL), which was also founded in 1906. An organization spearheaded by one Nissim Behar of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, the NLIL was officially nonpartisan and nonsectarian. Although it was prompted by the desire to ease the immigration of Russian Jews, and although Jews were its main directors, it aimed at making the fight against restriction an American rather than a Jewish issue. It concentrated mainly on intensive publicity campaigns and mass public rallies. In opposition to Williams, it vigorously opposed a higher head tax and a literacy test. Nevertheless, despite a national network

that linked it to other Jewish groups, it never gained the full cooperation of the AJC. Personality clashes and the NLIL's use of mass public protests kept the two agencies apart.[27]

While established Jews conducted their campaigns with the government and the new arrivals from eastern Europe, Russians who had immigrated after 1880 also spoke out on behalf of the immigrants. Their efforts often allied them with non-Jewish groups. A few weeks into Williams's second term, Jewish societies and newspapers mounted loud protests against practices on Ellis Island. The HSIAS complained about the twenty-five-dollar fee, Congressmen Henry Goldfogle of New York and Adolph Sabath of Chicago conferred with Williams about deportations of Jews, and the same congressmen and the grand masters of several Jewish fraternal orders resolved to ask Williams's superior, Secretary Nagel, for a meeting. While some protesters brought the matter directly to President Taft, public opinion and the press also took notice. The *New York World*, for example, wrote, "In this country a $25 rule would have kept the great West a wilderness; would have preserved the Great American Desert to this day; would have deprived the Pacific Coast of its forty-niners and the railroad builders; would have kept Benjamin Franklin out of Philadelphia." Overall, however, reactions were mixed; some sharply criticized Williams and others supported him. One Boston newspaper supportive of the commissioner stated, "In view of the laxity of the past years, the public will put faith in the wisdom of the commissioner's policy of strictness."[28]

In the summer of 1909 the foreign-language press began a renewed and better-coordinated campaign against Williams. Seeking an investigation of the commissioner's methods, which, they maintained, explained the alarming increase in the number of deportations, Jacob Saphirstein, editor of the popular Yiddish daily, *Jewish Morning Journal*, laid the matter before President Taft. He had pleaded earlier with Williams, with the Bureau of Immigration, and with the Department of Commerce and Labor, but their answers had not satisfied him. Saphirstein called for an awareness that Jewish deportees more than the others faced persecution in Europe, and he quoted adulatory statements about the Jews by former President Benjamin Harrison and Secretary of State John Hay. But he insisted that he spoke for all groups and, indeed, for all humanitarians. His brief against Williams rested on the all-encompassing charge that the commissioner's misinterpretations of immigration law undid precedents of many years and violated immigrants' legal rights. Specifically, Saphirstein concentrated on the LPC clause, the alien whose passage to America was prepaid, and the star chamber proceedings of the boards of inquiry that heard appeals against deportation. At the same time, he handed the case over to an attorney, Charles Dushkind, who had represented two Yiddish dailies in immigrant appeals at Ellis Island before Williams took office.[29] In this instance,

Saphirstein and the new arrivals were displaying their independence from the established American Jews.

The very request for a hearing to air the grievances against Williams irritated the commissioner and his superiors. Not only had a similar session with Williams and Nagel taken place recently, but nothing qualitatively new had been added to the agenda.[30] Repeated meetings with "members of the Hebrew faith" were, as the officials thought, without substantial merit. Nagel and the commissioner-general of immigration passed the matter on to subordinates, and neither one planned to attend the hearing. For his part, Williams, who cleared his answer with Nagel, saw no need to meet again with those who challenged his authority. "To attempt to satisfy such parties is hopeless," he proclaimed. Complainants, or those with an axe to grind, did not frighten him, he said, so long as he enjoyed the confidence of his superiors. In the end, however, Washington bowed to the request. Doubtless concerned about the political influence of the ethnic societies, who could resort to smear campaigns in the press during upcoming elections, officials agreed to go along with a hearing to "take the sting" out of the grievances. Regarding Saphirstein as a ringleader of the malcontents and the defenders of the east Europeans, Williams repeated some of his stock charges. He warned Nagel that if Saphirstein reached his goal of a liberal interpretation of immigration law, more undesirables from Europe would arrive and harm the very fabric of the nation. "We are hearing… too much about the alleged hardships suffered by immigrants, and too little about the welfare of our country." [31]

After weeks of negotiations about the content and roster of participants, Assistant Secretary of Commerce and Labor Ormsby McHarg set a hearing for 27 September 1909, in Williams's office.[32] Meantime, at McHarg's suggestion, Dushkind prepared and circulated detailed memoranda, which drew largely on judicial decisions—many mentioned in the Skuratowski brief—in support of the anti-Williams side. Those memoranda were to serve as the outline for the ethnics at the hearing.[33] In addition to Simon Wolf of the UAHC and Saphirstein, who was speaking for the Jews, representatives of the Italian and German press also participated in the closed sessions. For the most part, however, it was Dushkind, speaking for the foreign-language papers, who dominated the discussion. Addressing the points he had made in his memoranda, he claimed that his purpose was not to advocate a liberal immigration policy but to show how Williams had knowingly and blatantly violated the law. Instead of acting fairly and justly in executing the law, the commissioner had usurped the rightful powers of the legislature. Sounding like Max Kohler on that point, he maintained that it was up to Congress, not Williams, to enact the proper legislation.

Thanks to the circulation of Dushkind's preconference briefs, the officials present—Williams, McHarg, and Frank Larned for the Bureau of

Immigration—were well acquainted with the major issues to be discussed, i.e., prepaid passage, the LPC clause, and the immigrant's right to counsel and witnesses at the board of inquiry hearings. The only new points were Dushkind's account of his presence at inquiries before 1903 (which the government officials doubted) and the abuses of the steamship companies that attempted to lure prospective emigrants in Europe. Otherwise the discussion, usually between Dushkind and McHarg, went around and around as minute points of law and judicial decisions were defined and redefined. For example, when they discussed the LPC clause, the conference debated at great length the shades of meaning of the words "likely," "public," and "charge." The impatience of the federal officials colored the proceedings. They attacked Dushkind for alleged inconsistencies, and they defended Williams both for his regulations and his readiness to entertain visitors, including his critics, at Ellis Island. "The Commissioner has been courteous to a degree that would exceed my patience," McHarg announced at one point. Neither side convinced the other.[34] The dissatisfied ethnic societies learned that they would receive no relief from the Washington bureaucracy, and shortly thereafter they turned to Congress. Williams, however, dug in his heels: "I have every confidence in my own ability to conduct this office [properly] and, if the time ever comes when I feel unable to do this, I shall resign."[35]

Having fared poorly with representatives of the executive branch of the government, the ethnics turned to members of Congress. Thereby, their case against Williams directly entered the political arena. The Republican administration, now challenged by the Progressives, was on its way out, and Democrats in search of political capital for the elections of 1912 pounced on the issue, as it aroused strong popular emotions. As mentioned previously, Goldfogle and Sabath, both Democrats, had complained about the practices at Ellis Island at the beginning of Williams's second term. On 12 May 1911, another Democrat, Congressman William Sulzer of New York, a non-Jew and possible Democratic candidate in the next gubernatorial election, introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives authorizing the House Committee of Immigration and Naturalization to investigate complaints against Williams's administration regarding regulations and methods of decision-making.[36] When the hearings opened some two weeks later, Sulzer explained that Congress was obliged to consider the charges of the ethnics and their press against the "atrocities" and "inhumanities" practiced at Ellis Island.[37]

Determined to expose the alleged abuses, non-Jewish ethnic organizations joined the attack. German societies emerged as the leaders of both Jewish and non-Jewish groups. Aside from complaints about the physical conditions at Ellis Island, most witnesses spoke against unfair deportations, the tax for admission (which in some instances was as high as fifty dollars),[38] and abuses in connection with the LPC clause. In answer to the question, "Just in a word, what does an

immigrant go through when he comes to Ellis Island?" one witness said, "He goes through hell; that is the only explanation I know of."[39]

Among the witnesses who spoke for the Jews, Joseph Barondess, a labor leader who identified himself as a representative of the Yiddish newspaper *Wahrheit*, supplied information on individual cases that documented what they called Williams's inhumanity. Explaining why admission into the United States was a critical need for Russian Jews in particular, he said:

> May I also say to you that many unfortunate people of my faith look upon the Atlantic Ocean as their international cemetery, because they have no place where to go. When a German is deported he can still sing the "Wacht am Rhein." When an Irishman is deported he can still go to his home. But when my people are deported there is no home for them, and that is the reason why so many of my people are preferring death rather than to trust to blind fate, rather than to fall back into the clutches of… the Czar's Government.

Aaron Levy of Philadelphia, active in organizations that supported unrestricted immigration, also testified. Attacking the boards of inquiry, he said in part:

> The conditions surrounding the holding of the meetings of the boards of special inquiry are such as to make for the exercise of almost despotic power. Star chamber proceedings—a phrase that has been used repeatedly —are indulged in, it seems to me, and it seems to be the feeling of the people widely affected by these rulings that such an institution is un-American, is opposed to all principles of justice and fairness, and that these great United States should not be for a moment placed in the position of standing at the door and ruthlessly shutting people out by the use of unfair and unjustifiable means.[40]

The committee heard interesting testimony of a different sort from a former immigration inspector and frequent member of boards of inquiry at Ellis Island. Although he disagreed with some of Williams's opinions on immigration, he thought that the commissioner was an able and honorable civil servant and that the alleged abuses were the work of Williams's underlings:

> The great trouble with Mr. Williams is that he is too strict, not only with the enforcement of the law, but he is also too strict with his subordinates, and the natural consequence is that the subordinates are trying to out-William Williams. They do not want to take any chances.… Some of these men hate him so much that they have made up their minds that they will enforce the law in so obnoxious a way as possible and in that way make Mr. Williams so unpopular that he will soon have to go.[41]

The hearings recessed and were resumed at the end of July. At that time the pro-Williams side introduced prestigious supporters besides Williams himself—Commissioner-General of Immigration Daniel Keefe, Secretary Nagel, and several congressmen—to contest the charges of abuse and inequity against the

commissioner and his administration. Williams spoke first, and before a generally sympathetic committee, he bitterly attacked Sulzer for his abusive remarks. Lacing into the testimony, or what he called the misstatements, of the previous witnesses, he accused Barondess of errors in fact. Armed to the hilt with scores of case records, the commissioner delivered a strong defense of his methods. No one had complained to him personally, he told the committee: "I wish you gentlemen would come and see what a happy lot most of the immigrants on Ellis Island are." Admittedly, he had increased the number of deportations, but that was necessary to execute the law properly. He did not oppose a congressional investigation, for he had nothing to hide. Nor would critics and criticisms sway him from carrying out the law. Williams's statement was that of a confirmed restrictionist: "We have some of the dirtiest people in the world to deal with," he said. Openly, however, he displayed neither racist nor ethnic prejudices. He did not talk specifically about Jews, saying only that southern and eastern Europe were areas "from which the most desirable immigrants do not come."[42]

By the end of the first day the sessions turned into a veritable debate, and many of the witnesses who had testified in May were permitted to offer rebuttals. Appearing again for the Jews, Aaron Levy took issue with the commissioner's remark that he worked to carry out the "express mandate" of congressional law. Much like Max Kohler, Levy argued that Williams's acts went beyond the law, that in fact Williams and his staff were usurping legislative powers. Discussing three cases in detail in which young, able-bodied immigrants were deported because they were headed for congested cities, he said that nowhere did the law rule against those foreigners. Therefore, deportation constituted an illegal and cruel injustice at the hands of "complacent" and "arbitrary" officials. Another deportation occurred because the immigrant had no money, despite the fact that a relative who promised to support him had substantial resources. That decision too, Levy said, was harsh and unwarranted. He challenged Williams directly:

> Let us not forget that… a man vested with a little brief authority may do things that he has no right to do under the mandate of the people whose representative he is, and we are here to demand a compliance with the existing law, and to decry the employment of instrumentalities that defeat the objects and the purpose of the law.[43]

In the end, after Sulzer backed away from any ad hominem attacks on Williams, the committee took no action, and the resolution died.[44]

Although Nagel, Keefe, and even Taft upheld him publicly, Williams was concerned about his public image and looked for opportunities to defend himself and his methods in speeches—even one to a Jewish audience—interviews, and letters to *The New York Times*.[45] His annual report for the year ending 30 June 1911 had a decidedly defensive tone. He sympathetically described the work of the boards of inquiry that was so essential for excluding "the riffraff and scum

which is constantly seeking to enter." He summarized the hearings on Sulzer's resolution, and he stated that every specific complaint was met "and shown to be without foundation or based on a false or misleading statement of facts." Again he blamed the German newspapers for stirring up trouble and inciting Sulzer. Also at fault were the inadequacies of the law and the unsavory practices of the steamship companies. In the report, Williams expounded his opinions yet again on the undesirable new immigration. He didn't use the term "Jews," but some of his words hinted broadly at them. The following passage is illustrative:

> The new immigration, unlike that of the earlier years, proceeds in part from the poorer elements of the countries of southern and eastern Europe and from backward races with customs and institutions widely different from ours and without the capacity of assimilation with our people as did the early immigrants. Many of those… have very low standards of living, possess filthy habits, and are of an ignorance which passes belief. Types of the classes referred to representing alien races and nationalities may be observed in some of the tenement districts of Elizabeth, Orchard, Rivington, and East Houston Streets [the heart of the Jewish ghetto on New York's Lower East Side].… They often herd together, forming in effect foreign colonies in which the English language is almost unknown.

The commissioner also contended that the new immigrants displaced American workers as tailors, cap makers, painters, carpenters, and bakers, which were all "Jewish trades" or trades to which immigrant Jews flocked.[46]

The publication of Williams's report drew the applause of prominent restrictionists. Harvard Professor Robert DeCourcy Ward for one, a racist and a founder of the elitist IRL, congratulated the commissioner on the dignified manner in which he responded to his bigoted critics. Ward served on the committee on immigration of the National Conference of Charities and Correction (NCCC), and he hoped to use that post in support of the commissioner. He thought that Julian Mack, a Jew and president of the NCCC, had "packed" the organization's committee on immigration, but although it consisted "almost entirely of Jews," he, Ward, would do his best.[47]

The report also evoked various Jewish reactions. The most unusual response came from a group calling itself the Citizens' Committee of Orchard, Rivington, and East Houston Streets. In a long, respectful, but not obsequious, letter to President Taft, members of the group condemned Williams for the unwarranted and "gratuitous" insults directed at them in his report. His remarks, they said, dealt with matters beyond his jurisdiction and would best serve to inflame the prejudices of his staff. Requesting a retraction, they recounted the virtues of the neighborhood and its residents. What made their petition unusual, however, were its lists of every householder on fifty-seven blocks and its statistical tables of occupations, social institutions, and business establishments. In greater detail

than a federal census, it fleshed out a small area in New York City that was more than 90 percent Jewish. A final section, which listed schools and libraries, included statements from district librarians that emphasized the residents' thirst for education and the children's use of public libraries. The letter failed to secure a retraction from the commissioner, but Senator James O'Gorman of New York brought it to Congress's attention, and it was printed as a Senate document.[48] (For portions of the petition, see Appendix.)

Aside from its substance, the petition of the Citizens' Committee was significant as a reminder of the rapid maturation and acculturation of the east European immigrants. First, as indicated by the number of real estate owners and professionals listed, it showed that residence within the ghetto did not preclude the possibility of vertical mobility. Second, the petition reflected a Jewish constituency that was rapidly absorbing American ways, in this case the use of the petition to register a protest or grievance within a democratic society. Third, the document presaged the shift in Jewish communal control away from a small number of self-selected stewards. In the prewar years, the defense of American Jewish interests rested almost exclusively in the hands of the established Jews, and it was customary for the masses to appeal to those uptown Jews to represent them on such matters. In 1911, however, the Lower East Side and its press acted independently. The Citizens' Committee petition was a high point in these immigrants' efforts, letting it be known that the newer arrivals themselves could decide when and how to respond without any signals from the uptowners. Many years would elapse before the shift of power was completed, but the process was underway.

At that time, however, the new immigrants were as yet unable to successfully challenge the power the AJC wielded over communal defense. More concerned than the UAHC, the AJC, a conservative agency of the established Jews, feared that the outrage of the Russian immigrants could lead to wildcat action or "inappropriate" agitation that would challenge the stewards' control. Publicly, they admitted that the situation at Ellis Island since Williams's return in 1909 was "distressing" and "necessitated some action," but their strategy ruled out "aimless and baseless agitation." They thought that the Skuratowski brief and Max Kohler's report in 1911 had been appropriate, but the rantings of the Yiddish press on the LPC clause and assisted immigration strengthened anti-Jewish restrictionist sentiment and simultaneously jeopardized the AJC's campaign on anti-Jewish discrimination in Russia. The group claimed, moreover, that the Ellis Island situation had improved after Kohler and Elkus made suggestions to Secretary Nagel in the wake of the Skuratowski episode. Since the AJC believed that discreet pressure of that sort was preferable to noisy publicity, downtown had to be curbed. Accordingly, the agency arranged small conferences at which Kohler, representing the AJC, met with representatives of other Jewish agencies concerned with immigration. At one such conference the other

agencies included the New York *kehillah*, a community-wide organization of numerous Jewish economic and social agencies, Jewish fraternal orders, and the American Jewish Society for the Regulation of Immigration. The conference in turn issued a lengthy statement that took exception to downtown's blanket criticism of Williams. Admittedly, deportations had increased, but:

> The increased stringency in the administration of the law, of which complaint has been made, has in fact produced a result much less striking than might have been supposed, in view of the recent agitation. Thus, for example, during the month of July, 1909, there were 8155 Jewish immigrants who came to the Port of New York, of whom 280 were deported, and although the number of deportations shows a larger percentage than during any previous like period, these figures do not justify the statement which has been made in a portion of the Yiddish press, that America is closed to the Jews. On the contrary, it is the firm opinion of the members of the Conference that whilst… errors of judgment have undoubtedly occurred on the part of the commissioner and his subordinates, no race or religious prejudices have been evinced by them.

The statement protected the turf and the operative principles of the established Jews in the AJC. Aside from asserting the AJC's control of Jewish defense, Kohler may also have realized the futility of challenging racist arguments, particularly since ethnic counterarguments could well exacerbate the racist attacks. (As he himself said elsewhere, the mood of the country testified to a new "Know-Nothing Era.")

Although Kohler had been less circumspect where he had attacked both the findings of the Dillingham Commission and the arbitrary regulations and "unwarranted exclusions" by Williams and his staff that resulted from the star chamber methods of the boards of inquiry, he supported the efforts of the conference to improve public relations. Following his consistent emphasis on the sanctity of the law, the conferees defended the rights of those legally entitled to immigrate, but they pledged not to condone the entry of illegal arrivals, even if their exclusion appeared inhumane. "This conclusion is deemed to be correct not only because it is in recognition of and obedience to the law, but because in a large sense the immigration policy of the United States has been so entirely humane that minor hardships must be endured in the interests of the many." Thus, they presented a moderate compromise; they would defend the rights only of those permitted legal entry, proving thereby to public opinion that defense of Jewish interests made them no less attentive to American needs.[49] They may also have thought that scrupulous acceptance and observance of the law could lessen the clamor for additional restrictive legislation.

At a meeting of the UAHC in 1911, Kohler delivered a lengthy paper on the abuses of the aliens under Williams's administration. He opened with the assertion that Jews too wanted the enforcement of the immigration laws, that they also wanted to bar the physically defective and those likely to become a

public charge. Recalling the welcome extended by America to his generation, the old immigrants, he proceeded to demand "justice for all," particularly for the persecuted Jews of eastern Europe. Figures proved, he said, that the percentage of exclusions and deportations at Ellis Island had increased sharply. Although other nationalities suffered as well, the persecutions in Russia and Romania made the Jewish plight worse. Two-thirds of the rising number of Jewish exclusions rested on the LPC clause and the "ever newer misconstructions of the law furtively forced upon inspectors at Ellis Island, day by day, breaking down their judicial attitude, and creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and anarchy and cowed timidity." Decisions that rested on the LPC clause were often arbitrary, and they revealed how administrators usurped legislative powers. Nor did appeals to the boards of inquiry, where the alien labored under weighty obstacles, prove any sounder. In sum, it was not the law but how it was administered that was at fault. Kohler obviously was indicting Williams, but he refrained from calling the commissioner a racist or antisemite.[50]

Whatever the differences in tactics between the established Jews and the new arrivals, the established leaders quietly fumed over Williams's 1911 report. While they continued to urge the government to take a more lenient approach to the LPC clause, they focused on Williams as well. Kohler had sharply attacked Williams's administration at the session of the UAHC, and in 1911 Judge Julian Mack publicly criticized Williams before a nonsectarian audience.[51] Jacob Schiff, less conciliatory than at the HSIAS meeting, preferred to use his influence behind the scenes. He had received a letter from Professor Henry Osborn, president of the Museum of Natural History, asking him to curb the "outrageous misrepresentation" against Williams that came largely from "Hebrew sources." Had not Henry Dannenbaum, one of the "prominent and intelligent Hebrews," spoken publicly in support of Williams and against Jewish critics? Schiff was unmoved:

> My own opinion of Commissioner Williams is that he means to be a conscientious official, but that his actions as Commissioner of Immigration at his Port are largely influenced by his evident restrictionist tendencies, and that instead of tempering justice with mercy, he does the reverse, and seeks to apply the law in as extreme a manner as he can stretch it.

If Osborn read Williams's report, Schiff continued, he would agree that the opposition to the commissioner from non-Jewish as well as Jewish sources was justifiable. Schiff curbed his temper with respect to Osborn, but he did not spare Dannenbaum. "He ought to be ashamed of much he has said," the banker asserted. Since Dannenbaum, the president of a district of B'nai B'rith in New Orleans, had broken ranks and joined the enemies of Jewish immigrants, Schiff complained to Adolf Kraus, head of the International Order B'nai B'rith: "I cannot see how the B'nai B'rith can remain silent and permit Mr. Dannenbaum

not only to remain a district leader, but even a member of the organization." In fact he, Schiff, was prepared to resign if no action was taken.[52] Meantime, Williams gleefully circulated Dannenbaum's speech. To Theodore Roosevelt he added a comment, doubtless a stab at Schiff, that in and of itself warranted the charge of antisemitism: "It has always seemed to me that there are a great many very estimable Jews who make the mistake (though unwilling to concede it) of considering the interests of their race before those of their country."[53]

By that remark the commissioner broadened the issue. Instead of focusing solely on the repugnant character of the new immigrants, which was his wont, he raised an uglier threat—i.e., that the Jewish stand on immigration proved that Jews ranked loyalty to America below their partisan concerns. When Osborn renewed his correspondence with Schiff, he argued that Williams was acting only in America's best interests. The Jewish banker was now forced into a defensive, and weaker, position. He insisted that Jews too thought in terms of the country's interests and that they too agreed that those mentally, physically, and morally unsound, as well as paupers or those liable to become public charges, should be barred from entry. "What we object to," he explained, "is that the law, as it exists, be twisted into new theories of construction [as done by Williams] contrary to established precedents and decisions of the courts."[54]

Tensions between Williams and the antirestrictionists mounted in 1912. Following the report of the Dillingham Immigration Commission, many bills, including the literacy test, were introduced into Congress to restrict immigration still further.[55] While the friends of free immigration looked for support from the three major candidates—Republican Taft, Democrat Wilson, and Progressive Roosevelt—Williams's office collected more articles from the foreign language press that, according to the commissioner, illustrated the "continued abuse of the Ellis Island authorities." One from the Yiddish *Wahrheit*, for example, ran under a melodramatic title—"Vera Jaffee, Whose Intended Husband Was Killed By Williams' Hangmen, On Ellis Island, Through The Most Inhumane Libel On His Sweetheart, Was After All Not Permitted To Land." It went on to report that Jaffee, a young Russian woman engaged to be married, "was outrageously accused of having had illicit intercourse with the intended husband," and despite her denial was taken before a board of inquiry. Applying "Jesuit"-like tactics, the board forced her to confess. The paper continued: "What could a poor, wretched, weak girl, who was surrounded by a band of inquisitors without a protector and not one friendly face around her, do?" The episode ended sadly for Jaffee; her fiancé, who had been hospitalized, died, and she was deported back to Russia. Williams accomplished what he wanted, the *Wahrheit* concluded, and "America was saved from the fearful danger of having two more Jewish immigrants!"[56]

In August of that year, Chicago Congressman Sabath, a Jew who called himself a fighter for the immigrants and the interests of the foreign born,

inserted a lengthy piece in the *Congressional Record* that combined a pitch for Wilson and the Democrats—the Democrats appreciated the immigrants while the Republicans (i.e. Roosevelt, Taft, and their subordinates) held narrow and biased views—with a denunciation of Williams. It was an "evil day" for immigrants and their friends, Sabath said, when Taft appointed the commissioner in 1909. Because of his "relentless course against the immigrant," Williams's name is "execrated" by every new arrival to American shores since his second term began. Sabath offered examples of the commissioner's bigoted tactics and his prejudice against immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. In support of his charges, the congressman inserted statistics, testimony from the 1911 hearings, and the petition from the Jewish district on the Lower East Side. He claimed that the data showed that the commissioner's administrators were "inexcusably harsh and arbitrary."[57] Sabath's accusations were not new, but his attack brought Williams and the procedures at Ellis Island to the attention of Congress.

Again, as he had in 1911, Williams sought to refute the witnesses who had testified against him. He wrote a scathing reply that accused Sabath of lying. According to the commissioner's letter, Sabath indulged in misrepresentations; his facts and allegations were false, and, resorting to "tricky methods," he maliciously ignored the defense of Williams at the congressional hearings of 1911 and Secretary Nagel's statement on his behalf. Had Sabath made his case on the floor of the House rather than inserting his remarks in the appendix to the *Congressional Record*, Williams said, he would have been answered by his colleagues. Williams reminded the congressman of his, Sabath's, visits to Ellis Island and of the frequent messages he had sent to the commissioner. To be sure, Sabath had had ample opportunity to complain to Williams if he had found anything amiss, but he kept silent for years until the political campaigns gained momentum.[58]

The Sabath/Williams exchange was widely circulated, and the commissioner drew the support of restrictionists in and out of Congress.[59] Henry Dannenbaum resurfaced too, congratulating Williams for his letter and promising its publication by a Jewish newspaper in Texas. Williams thanked Dannenbaum effusively and told him of another Jew, a lawyer in Boston, who called Sabath's attack "an insult to the intelligence of all Jewish citizens, most of whom desire that the country shall receive at least the protection it now does from the defective and delinquent classes of Europe and Asia."[60]

While such Jews spoke neither for the leaders nor the rank and file of American Jewry, Sabath's attack led the strict restrictionists to add an openly antisemitic component to their brief. Prescott Hall, the guiding spirit of the patrician-led IRL, warned Sabath directly of an antisemitic backlash that could well result from his attack on Williams. Broadly hinting at Jewish

power and Jewish lust for control over Christian states, his words echoed long-lived stereotypes:

> Your attack is not only malicious, but it is very ill-advised, for it is liable to convey to the public the idea that our Jewish citizens are opposed to the immigration laws and to the enforcement of such laws as Congress has passed. While this is not the attitude of a large number of Jewish citizens, it would be unfortunate if your remarks should represent them in the public mind; *for the time has not yet come when the American people is ready to surrender the government of this country to a minority of citizens of foreign birth* of whatever race or country, nor do Hebrew citizens in my opinion desire this or desire that the country shall cease to be protected from the defective and delinquent classes of Europe and Asia. (Emphasis added.)[61]

In the end, Sabath, like Sulzer before him, backed off. Both congressmen had based their cases against Williams in large measure on the emotional stories of the ethnic press and ethnic societies, but Williams, making good use of his legal skills, was the sharper debater. His office collected public comments about him, and since he knew what his attackers would say, he came well prepared to respond. A hard worker who was committed to his job and who labored to improve the physical facilities of Ellis Island,[62] he also knew the details of outstanding cases that had drawn accusations against the boards of inquiry and had ended in deportations. Of the same social class as his prestigious supporters, the commissioner had the confidence to dismiss the charges of the "lowly" foreigners. Nor were his opponents equipped to challenge his racist arguments or his accusation that they disregarded the national interest.

As in the Saphirstein hearing of 1909, neither side in 1911 and 1912 yielded or admitted defeat. The ethnic press was not silenced, nor did Williams modify his rulings regarding the LPC regulations and the boards of inquiry. With the aid of a highly disciplined staff, he gained approval and support from the public, particularly the restrictionists. His superiors in Washington, sensitive only to political signals, preferred to ignore the charges against him and to defend him against his critics. Most important, Williams was in tune with the spirit of restriction and racism that the vast majority of "proper" Americans increasingly shared, which would peak in the 1920s.

Congressmen Sulzer and Sabath, however, had not lost entirely. Their purpose may well have been to publicize the case of the immigrants, and in that they succeeded. Despite their failure with regard to Williams, both loyal Democrats chalked up points with the immigrant populations, specifically in New York and Chicago, in the preliminaries to the 1912 presidential race. Sulzer, for example, injected the issue of Jewish interests, including immigration, in the three-way election when he ran for governor of New York against a Jew, the Progressive candidate Oscar Straus. He may not have actually said,

"Whenever the name of William Sulzer is spoken to Jewish people they fall to their knees and thank God for his life," but similar boasts helped earn him the votes of many Jews.[63]

Complaints about Williams subsided. Neither Roosevelt nor Taft had ousted the commissioner from office or even reprimanded him, but Wilson's election only weeks after the Williams-Sabath exchange promised a change of personnel in the Bureau of Immigration. Concerned Jews now concentrated on the need to block the passage of further restrictive measures sparked by the report of the Dillingham Immigration Commission and aimed primarily at immigration from southern and eastern Europe. Their efforts were at best only a holding action. Indeed, Jewish defense and the entire Williams affair had no major impact on the arrival of tens of thousands of new eastern Europeans before World War I. After a temporary lull that followed the war and the Russian Revolution of 1917, the defenders of Jewish immigrants confronted a new and more serious upsurge of nativism that ultimately culminated in the harsh quota legislation of the 1920s.

Put in perspective, the account of Commissioner Williams and the Jews, albeit a relatively short story that lasted barely ten years, reflects aspects of the Progressive Era. Most striking is its illumination of the growth of the administrative branch of government, a favorite Progressive device, often at the expense of the enumerated powers of the legislature and the judiciary. Irrespective of his policies, Williams was primarily an administrator who interpreted and applied, and thereby shaped, the law to reflect his opinions and judgments. Like the Progressives who advocated centralized administration as a means of solving the economic and social problems of a corporate age, so did Williams behave with respect to the problems at Ellis Island. The Progressive Era also witnessed the entrenchment of nativism and racism in popular opinion,[64] and Williams was their spokesman on the matter of immigration.

The story of Williams and the Jews raises questions specifically related to antisemitism. On the basis of the evidence presented, is the claim that Williams was an antisemite justified? If he was, were the presidents who appointed him, Roosevelt and Taft, antisemites? Even more important, why didn't the leading defenders of the Jewish immigrants, such as Max Kohler, accuse Williams openly of antisemitism? If Schiff or Straus or Sulzberger threatened elected officeholders with the Jewish vote, the politically conscious officials might have been more responsive to complaints about the commissioner. To be sure, Williams made no secret of his racist opinions and his aversion to the new ethnic groups from southern and eastern Europe, but despite the charges made by some Jews and their fellow ethnics, he was not an antisemite. He did not repeat the old antisemitic stereotypes on which racist Jew-hatred was based; he saw fit in speeches to Jewish audiences to praise some Jewish characteristics, and the closest he came to outright hate-mongering was his comment to Roosevelt that some

"estimable" Jews ranked their Jewish interests above the needs of the nation. Williams shared the "polite" antisemitism and prejudices of the patrician class to which he belonged, but he was no more an antisemite than the men who chose him. Indeed, both Roosevelt and Taft were hardly Jew-haters. They too shared the same patrician biases, but their personal tastes did not interfere with their political and professional associations.

The principal defenders of Jewish immigration from Russia, the communal leaders in the UAHC and AJC such as Kohler and Abram Elkus, purposely shied away from openly accusing Williams of antisemitism. Sensitive to the currents of Jew-hatred particularly after 1880, they were restrained by a combination of reasons. For one thing, Jewish history had taught them the futility of combating the irrationality of Judeophobia. More important, as those who had long preached the necessity of acculturation, they believed that Jewish security in the United States depended on the minority's accommodation to American law and traditions. Their accommodationist posture was accompanied by a faith in American exceptionalism. Never before had Jews in modern times enjoyed comparable freedoms and opportunities, and were their leaders to admit that America had succumbed to the age-old antisemitic canards now prevalent in racist garb on the European continent, they would become ideologically bankrupt. Were that to happen, their control of the newcomers, as in their admonitions on the dangers of noisy public agitation, would be considerably weakened. In sum, it appeared more advisable to argue that Williams had been guilty of *un-American* acts, i.e., administrative acts that usurped legislative powers or ran counter to accepted judicial opinions.

The case the Jews and their defenders put forward against Williams and on behalf of immigration from eastern Europe made little impression on the commissioner's superiors. More to the point, it had no lasting effect. The entire episode faded in importance in the decade after the war when the currents of nativism and antisemitism swelled to new heights.

Appendix

From the petition of the Citizens' Committee in answer to Williams's remarks as summarized on pp. 113–114. See n. 48 for full reference to printed source.

Hon. William H. Taft

Sir:

Although this report of Mr. Williams [for 1911] is supposed to relate solely to Ellis Island affairs, fully two pages are devoted to matters having no bearing whatsoever upon the affairs at Ellis Island, but are evidently interpolated for restrictionist purposes.

While the individual views of the commissioner are no concern of ours, we are vitally interested in that portion of his report which undertakes to reflect upon us.… We deny emphatically that there is any truth in the strictures imposed by this public official upon the inhabitants of Orchard, Rivington, and East Houston Streets. A large proportion of them are citizens of the United States, loyal to their country and to its institutions, seeking by their industry to add to the well-being of the community in which they reside. Those who are not citizens intend to become such at the earliest opportunity. Although most of the residents of those streets are of foreign birth, they have come to this country for the purpose of establishing permanent homes, of rearing and educating their children as good Americans, and of enjoying the blessings of freedom, at the same time assuming and performing the obligations which residence and citizenship entail.

A survey of the district whose good name is involved in the strictures contained in Mr. Williams's report, indicating the nationalities and the moral, social, and industrial activities of the population in such district, is hereto appended. [Omitted here.] It is believed that the statistics thus presented for your consideration will demonstrate, not only that the statements made by Mr. Williams are false, but that they are libelous, and that no public officials should be permitted with impunity thus to malign a large and populous section of this great city.

Remarks of this character, emanating from one occupying the official position that Mr. Williams fills, are calculated to do great injury to those who are included within them. They are particularly objectionable because they are apt to arouse unwarranted prejudices against immigrants, and especially among immigration inspectors, who are his subordinates.…

Under the circumstances we are impelled, not only for self-protection but because we believe it to be our duty as citizens, to protest against these wanton and unjustifiable reflections upon us; against this attempt on the part of a public official to discriminate among those who have passed through the gate

at Ellis Island, and who have become absorbed in the general population of this country.

Moreover, we consider the remarks to which we have taken umbrage as a gratuitous insult, because in making them Mr. Williams did not deal with any matter which came within his jurisdiction, which is confined to Ellis Island, but has seen fit, either maliciously or without knowledge of the conditions which he seeks to describe, to animadvert upon us and those who we represent, all of whom are striving to the utmost of their power to maintain the respect and good will of their fellow citizens.

We therefore respectfully pray that such action may be taken in the premises as will vindicate our reputation and that of our families and neighbors, and will result in the retraction of the libelous charge of which we complain.

Dated, New York, April 9, 1912.

Notes

[1]Thomas M. Pitkin, *Keepers of the Gate* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 45–46, 52; Alan M. Kraut, *The Huddled Masses* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1982), 54–56, 59; Amy Fairchild, *Science at the Borders* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), especially part 1. A very recent book deals with the hospital on Ellis Island. Lorie Conway, *Forgotten Ellis Island* (New York: Smithsonian, 2007).

[2]Bureau of Immigration, *Reports of the Department of Commerce and Labor, 1909* (Washington, DC, 1910), 232, puts the daily number at five thousand for the peak year of 1907.

[3]Williams in *Who's Who in America*, 7, 1912–1913; Roosevelt appointed Williams at least in part because of a scandal that revealed corrupt practices by immigration officials. Kraut, 59–60.

[4]Pitkin, 44; *Hearings on House Resolution No. 166*, *Hearings Held Before the Committee on Rules, House of Representatives* (Washington, DC, 1911), 29 May 1911, 27.

[5]Henry P. Guzda, "Ellis Island a Welcome Site?" *Monthly Labor Review* 109 (July 1986): 31.

[6]Williams to commissioner-general of immigration, 23 April 1903, Williams to T. Roosevelt, 29 January 1903, New York Public Library, Williams Papers (hereafter cited as WP), box 5, file misc, New York; Pitkin, 53–54.

[7]Pitkin, 43–44, 48.

[8]Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), ch. 1.

[9]"Remarks on Immigration," address delivered to the senior class at Princeton, November 1904, WP.

[10]See "In Defense of the Immigrant," *American Jewish Year Book* (hereafter cited as *AJYB)* 12 (1910–1911): 19–98 for the case made by the established communal leaders in the AJC.

[11]Williams to N. Bijur, 13 January 1905, WP, box 5, file misc.

[12]A. Tedesco to Williams, 9 December 1904, WP, box 1, file 12.

[13]E.P. Hutchinson, *Legislative History of American Immigration Policy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), especially 102–103, 413–414; Pitkin, 45. In 1891 Secretary of the Treasury Charles Foster had yielded to the pleas of representatives of the UAHC that aliens assisted by private charities did not fall under the LPC clause. Foster conditioned the exemption with the proviso that the Jews would work to disperse those immigrants away from the eastern seaports. By the time Williams took office, the arrangement with Foster was no

longer observed. Esther Panitz, "In Defense of the Jewish Immigrant," *The Jewish Experience in America*, 5, ed. Abraham J. Karp (Waltham and New York: American Jewish Historical Society, 1969), 25–27.

[14]See my article, "Relocation and Relief," Hunter College Jewish Studies Program, *Occasional Papers*, no. 8 (New York, 2000).

[15]Pitkin, 56, 58–59.

[16]Williams to T. Roosevelt, 29 January 1903, WP.

[17]P. Cowen to M. Loeb et al., 14 December 1905, Papers of the National Committee for Relief of Sufferers by Russian Massacres, Correspondence Files, American Jewish Historical Society (hereafter cited as AJHS), NY. Cowen's autobiography, *Memories of an American Jew* (New York: International Press, 1932), provides no information on the alleged abuses of the boards of inquiry or of Williams's staff, and Williams's name is not mentioned even once.

[18]P. Cowen to F. Sargent, 22 February 1904, Philip Cowen Collection, AJHS, NY. Williams assigned Cowen to investigate the activities of a Jewish revolutionary from Russia who lectured to Yiddish-speaking audiences. P. Cowen to F. Sargent, 6 December 1907, Philip Cowen Collection, AJHS, NY. In 1906, for the information of the president, Cowen was sent to Europe to investigate the causes of the large emigration from Russia. Cowen, ch. 8.

[19]Printed copy in WP. One talk was delivered to the American Social Science Association.

[20]The Industrial Removal Office, created by the Baron de Hirsch Fund, sought to relocate immigrants from the Atlantic seaboard to less congested areas. The Galveston Plan encouraged immigrants to land at Galveston instead of the eastern ports and to then be dispersed to points in the Midwest. Samuel Joseph, *History of the Baron de Hirsch Fund* (Fairfield, NJ: A.M. Kelley, 1978), ch. 5; Naomi W. Cohen, *Jacob H. Schiff* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 159–168.

[21]Naomi W. Cohen, *A Dual Heritage* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 152–158; Pitkin, 53–56.

[22]*Reports of the Department of Commerce and Labor, 1909*, 230–232. A file in the Philip Cowen Collection contains circulars from Williams's office, many of which contained admonitions on the strict interpretation of immigration law. See memorandum by Williams, "The Terms 'Pauper' and 'Likely to Become a Public Charge,'" 1 August 1910.

[23]Panitz, 30–32; *AJYB* 12 (1910–1911): 347.

[24]Naomi W. Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1984), 241–246; see especially Max J. Kohler, *The Immigration Question, With Particular Reference to the Jews of America* (address delivered at the 22nd Council of the UAHC, *Proceedings* of the UAHC, 18 January 1911), 1–10; the *Proceedings* for that date include Secretary Nagel's response to Kohler.

[25]Williams charged that some of the immigrant aid societies were "grossly mismanaged," and he warned that he would respond with "drastic action." *Reports of the Department of Commerce and Labor, 1909*, 232. In 1909 alone more than sixty thousand cases were heard before boards of inquiry and more than ten thousand aliens were rejected. Marc L. Raphael, "The Jewish Community and Ellis Island," *Michael* 3 (1975): 172–173.

[26]*The New York Times* (24 January 1910); *American Hebrew* (28 January 1910); Mark Wischnitzer, *Visas to Freedom* (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Co., 1956), 61.

[27]Rivka S. Lissak, "The National Liberal Immigration League and Immigration Restriction, 1906–1917," *American Jewish Archives Journal* 47 (Fall/Winter 1994):197–238; Naomi W. Cohen, *Not Free to Desist* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1972), 38–43, 48–50.

[28]*AJYB* 12 (1910–1911): 99–100; Pitkin, 58, 60–62; *Washington Star* (15 July 1909), WP; *Boston Daily Advertiser* (9 July 1909).

[29]J. Saphirstein to W. Taft, 19 August 1909, Williams to D. Keefe, 14 September 1909, unaddressed and undated memorandum from C. Dushkind, "In re Petition Against Alleged Unjust Exclusion of Immigrants," National Archives—Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A–Part 3 (hereafter cited as RINS), Reel 5-0484, casefile 52600/13, Washington DC.

[30]J. Saphirstein to W. Taft, 19 Aug. 1909, RINS, Reel 5-0484, casefile 52600/13. In this letter the writer used the term "star chamber" proceedings. Williams answered the arguments in a long letter to Secretary Charles Nagel, 9 September 1909.

[31]Williams to C. Nagel, 9 September 1909, Williams to D. Keefe, 14 September 1909, O. McHarg to C. Nagel, 15, 18, 21, 30 September 1909, McHarg to J. Magnes, 30 September 1909, RINS, Reel 5-0484, casefile 52600/13. McHarg, disdainful of "these people," was concerned about the political implications of the issue.

[32]A stenographic report of the hearing can be found in RINS, Reel 5-0564, casefile 52600/13A. Unless otherwise noted, all material for this and the next paragraph comes from that report.

[33]Two undated memoranda by Dushkind, the first in RINS, Reel 5-0484, casefile 52600/13, the second to Nagel in RINS, Reel5-0564, casefile 52600/13A; in casefile 52600/13, see also O. McHarg to C. Nagel, 21 September 1909.

[34]See also Williams to C. Dushkind, 3 October 1909, RINS, Reel 5-0484, casefile 52600/13.

[35]Williams to O. McHarg, 14 April 1910, RINS, Reel 5-0564, casefile 52600/13A.

[36]Jews had testified before that committee a year earlier, when a hearing was granted to opponents of further immigration restriction. See reference in n.10.

[37]*Hearings on House Resolution No. 166*, 29 May 1911, 3–5, 50.

[38]Ibid., 10 and 11 July 1911, 62–63.

[39]Ibid., 29 May 1911, 15.

[40]Ibid., 16–21, 28–35.

[41]Ibid., 43.

[42]Ibid., 10 and 11 July 1911, 51–94, 175–180.

[43]Ibid., 10 and 11 July 1911, 136–142. In an answer directed to Levy and other Jews, Nagel claimed that he interpreted the law liberally on immigrant appeals, 180–185.

[44]Ibid., 10 and 11 July 1911, 154–158.

[45]For example, *The New York Times*, 27 May 1911, 22 January, 2 February, 15 July, 11 October, 30 November 1912; Pitkin, 51–52, 57, 62.

[46]*Ellis Island, New York, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Immigration for the Port of New York… for the Year Ended June 30, 1911* (Washington, DC, 1911), especially 6, 15.

[47]R. Ward to Williams, 15 November 1911, WP, box 2.

[48]*Views on Immigration, Petition of Citizens of Orchard, Rivington, and East Houston Streets, New York City, Relative to the Reports of Officials and the Condition of Immigrants,* 62 Cong. 2 Sess., Sen. Doc. No. 785 (Washington, DC, 1912).

[49]*AJYB* 12 (1910–1911): 348–349; *Proceedings of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1911*, 6596–6598, 6609.

[50]Published as Kohler, *The Immigration Question*.

[51]*AJYB* 14 (1912–1913):117.

[52]"Extract from Address of Henry J. Dannenbaum," 9 January 1912, WP, box 5; H. Osborn to J. Schiff, 22 January 1912, J. Schiff to H. Osborn, 25 January 1912, Schiff to A. Kraus, 25 January 1912, American Jewish Committee Archives, General Correspondence Files, Jacob Schiff file, NY.

[53]Williams to T. Roosevelt, 31 January 1912, WP, box 5, file misc.

[54]H. Osborn to J. Schiff, 11 March 1912, WP, box 2; Schiff to H. Osborn, 15 March 1912, Schiff Papers in archives of The Jewish Theological Seminary, NY; H. Osborn to Schiff, 22 Jan. 1912, Schiff Papers in files of the AJC, NY.

[55]The House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization held hearings in 1912 on various restrictive measures, and again Joseph Barondess and Aaron Levy testified, along with other defenders of liberal immigration. Their principal themes—America's tradition of welcoming the immigrant, the contributions of immigrants to the economy, and the immigrants' desire to Americanize rapidly—applied to all aliens and not merely Jews. Williams also made his views known and did not conceal his bias against the new immigrants. See for example *Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, House of Representatives*, 62 Cong. 2 Sess., (Washington, DC, 1912), especially 11 January, 17–24 February, 4–8 May 1912.

[56]"Instances of Continued Abuse of the Ellis Island Authorities by Certain Newspapers Printed in Foreign Languages," translation of article from the *Wahrheit* (14 July 1912), WP, box 5.

[57]*Congressional Record, Appendix*, 62 Cong. 2 Sess., 790–805 (23 August 1912). A letter from Sabath to Philip Cowen, 19 April 1910, indicates that the congressman had been long aware of the prejudice of Williams's administration. Philip Cowen Collection, AJHS, NY.

[58]Williams to A. Sabath, 17 September 1912, WP, box 5.

[59]R. Ward to Williams, 24 September 1912, WP, box 2, J. Lee to Williams, 27 September 1912, W. Dillingham to Williams, 27 September 1912, H. Danforth to Williams, 30 September 1912, A. Gardner to Williams, 30 September 1912, WP, box 5; editorial in *The New York Times* (21 September 1912).

[60]H. Dannenbaum to Williams, 23 September 1912, Williams to H. Dannenbaum, 26 September 1912, WP, box 2.

[61]P. Hall to A. Sabath, 23 September 1912, WP, box 5. For a study of the IRL see Barbara M. Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1965).

[62]See Williams in *Reports of the Department of Commerce and Labor* for 1909 and 1911.

[63]Cohen, *A Dual Heritage*, 220–221.

[64]John Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), especially chs. 4 and 5.

The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Hebraist: The Life and Dreams of Aron Shimon Shpall[1]

Shuly Rubin Schwartz

Aron Shimon Shpall, n.d.
(Courtesy Peggy K. Pearlstein)

The story of mass Jewish migration from eastern Europe to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been recounted in great detail from numerous perspectives, including economic dislocation, cultural disorientation, separation from family, and loss of status. Among the immigrants were a small number of staunch adherents of the Hebrew movement whose adjustment to America took a specific path. Such individuals, influenced by the ideals of the Russian Haskalah movement, were dedicated to the strengthening of Jewish culture in Yiddish, Russian, and especially Hebrew. Devoted to the goals of the Hibbat Zion (Love of Zion) movement, they looked toward Palestine to realize their dreams, but only a small number of them succeeded in immigrating there. Many, because of politics, money, opportunity, or family ties, relocated to the United States. A unique window into the challenges of such immigrants can be found in the life of one of these individuals, Aron Shimon Shpall.[2]

Already in eastern Europe, Shpall belonged to this small group of Hebraists that saw itself as a cultural elite dedicated to promoting the Hebrew language as part of its broader devotion to the national-cultural revival of the Jewish people in Palestine. As a result of increasing impoverishment, violence, and government discrimination, many of these Jews left eastern Europe, particularly just before and after World War I. Some migrated not to Palestine, but to the United States, bringing with them a strong sense of mission and commitment to the dissemination of Hebrew culture, language, literature, and education. They debated whether or not they constituted a "movement" or whether the group should consist of elite writers and educators or should strive to influence the American Jewish population at large. But they came together in New York in 1917 to establish the Histadrut Ivrit of America, an organization dedicated to encouraging the knowledge and use of the Hebrew language, the publication of Hebrew books and periodicals, and an interest in Hebrew culture.[3]

Not all Hebraist immigrants lived in New York. Some traveled the country in search of employment, and many ended up in small towns and cities as teachers in Talmud Torahs. These independent educational institutions, based on the eastern European *heder metukkan* (improved heder), offered intensive supplementary education on Sundays and on weekdays after public school. Dedicated to educating children who would be fully at home in both American and Hebrew culture, these schools became the normative form of Jewish education in the first four decades of the twentieth century. The Hebraists introduced the *ivrit be-'ivrit* (Hebrew in Hebrew) method, i.e., the translating of the Hebrew of the Pentateuch or the Hebrew textbook into other Hebrew words rather than into Yiddish or English. In this way, they—to use the phrase coined by scholar of American Hebraism Alan Mintz—"kidnapped" Jewish education in the service of the Hebrew movement. Suffering from isolation and loneliness as they attempted to convey their love of the Hebrew language to uninterested children of immigrants, these far-flung American Hebraists saw themselves working in the trenches to enrich the Jewish cultural lives of the younger generation of American Jews.[4]

Shulamith Shpall, n.d.
(Courtesy Peggy K. Pearlstein)

Settling in New Orleans in 1922, Shpall was one such individual. In addition to his work as a Jewish educator, Shpall over several years authored numerous letters and other papers.[5] Thanks to this correspondence—most of which was written in a beautiful, literary Hebrew—the reader gains an intimate view of how one individual consciously worked to make Hebrew not only a dynamic force in Jewish life but also, as Mintz has described it, "the living tissue of daily life." Through Shpall's writings, one gains insight into how he fortified his passion for Hebrew despite the challenges and personal disappointments of living in the United States instead of Palestine; settling in New Orleans, a community far from the center of Jewish life in America, in a city where only 10,000 of 400,000 residents were Jews; and serving as a teacher after having been a high school principal in Russia.[6]

Aron Shimon Shpall was born in Belozerka, Russia, on 18 February 1875. According to the family genealogy scroll that he updated, he was "educated in Torah and Hasidut," and his father was a poor teacher. By the age of fifteen or sixteen, Shpall was forced to leave home to support himself, and like many yeshiva boys, he found work teaching in various villages. He notes that he enjoyed his work in each community, and this early, positive experience no doubt influenced him to pursue a career as an educator. Eventually, Shpall

found work in a progressive Jewish school. As an adult, he lived in the town of Kremenets, married Shulamith Guber, and reared four children.[7]

Before World War I, Kremenets was a town of about thirty thousand people, of which more than one-third were Jews. Since the non-Jewish residents lived mostly in the outskirts of town and in the mountains, Jewish residents of the town and its suburbs felt it to be predominantly Jewish. Kremenets had long been associated with the ideals of the Haskalah, for Isaac Baer Levinsohn (1788–1860), one of the founders of the Russian Haskalah, was born in Kremenets and returned to live there from 1823 until his death in 1860. In 1907, a co-ed *heder metukkan* opened in town. It provided a more modern Jewish education, and its students soon became the most active members of the local Zionist movement.[8]

Shpall earned a living first as a Hebrew tutor, teaching Torah to students privately and in small groups. He eventually became the principal of a Russian gymnasium[9] for Jews. Among the well-known intellectuals in the town who promoted cultural Zionism and aliyah, Shpall spoke and wrote in Yiddish and Russian as well as in Hebrew. But he was most passionate about the revival of the Hebrew language and, according to the Kremenets memorial volume, Aron Shimon Shpall's home "was the first in which Hebrew was the spoken language." Shpall spoke Hebrew to his three daughters and son. Although Shulamith shared her husband's interest in Hebrew, she spoke and wrote in Yiddish, thus ensuring that her children would know both languages well.[10]

Polish passport of Aron Shimon Shpall, issued 2 June 1921
(Courtesy Shuly Rubin Schwartz)

When Poland governed the area after World War I, it outlawed Zionist organizations, yet Zionist activity continued undiminished underground. During this period, several Zionist leaders were subjected to sudden arrests.[11] According to family lore, Shpall was among them. Although he was freed, he surely anticipated another arrest and feared that he might not gain release a second time. As he explained, he decided to leave because of "persecutions by the Bolsheviks and the Poles, and other terrible disasters that befell us in our town of Kremenets."[12] Shpall's brother and sisters, who had left previously and settled in Denver, Colorado, sent him the necessary travel expenses and affidavits, and Shpall and his family received Polish passports on 21 June 1921.[13]

For reasons that are unclear, the family did not leave immediately, and Shpall had to request that his visa be ratified again by the American consul in Poland. He wrote in Hebrew and included an English translation, for, as he explained, he wanted to write the letter himself and to his great regret was not fluent enough to compose a letter in English.[14] In his request, Shpall mounted a series of arguments to promote his case. He invoked Talmudic logic, noting that his visa had already been approved on 2 June and, according to "our Jewish laws," "'What is resolved can't be revolved.'"[15] He explained that, "I am going to Colorado, a province not populated very much, and my settlement there will have no bad influence upon the material life of the inhabitants." Clearly aware that immigrants to the United States needed to demonstrate that they would be productive members of society, Shpall further reassured the consul that his family is "very well educated" and will certainly be "valuable citizens" in time. Finally, he noted that as an experienced teacher with the status of a "privileged person," he hoped that he would be granted permission to immigrate with his family.

Despite this formal appeal, Shpall felt conflicted about leaving Kremenets, an emotion that he later captured in a letter to his children:

> Our homeland is dear to us. Even dearer to us is the city that we were born in and that we spent years of our lives in. We have extra affection for our family, and the home of our parents is the dearest of all. However, all the time that we live in our homeland and among our family, we don't recognize their worth. We look at all that is happening and it seems natural.… But it is different if things change, and we need to separate from our native land, and our birthplace and our father's house.[16] Then feelings of affection are awakened within us. . . We do not have longings for our motherland, because the land where we were born was like a mean stepmother to us. She embittered our lives and saddened our souls. If not for the 3 million of our brothers who live there, it could be overturned along with Sodom and Gomorrah[17] and the world would have lost nothing. But beneath this, we have longings for the city of our birth, but not the whole city, rather just the Jews who live there.[18]

Saddened at the thought of separating from the Jewish community where he spent "the best years of life,"[19] Shpall experienced further emotional turmoil as a passionate Zionist forced, by circumstance, to immigrate not to Palestine but to the United States. As he described in his diary:

> Yes! I dreamt sometimes of leaving this country, but for the sake of an entirely different country; of *that* country, to which I am bound historically, love for which I had sucked in with my mother's milk, for the restoration of which I have worked all my life.
>
> I dreamt of leaving this country for the sake of *that* country, which although I never was there, every corner of it is well known to me and loved by me; each name, as of those places, that are mentioned in the Bible, so of the new colonies there, sounds so sweet in my ears. "Hebron," "Jerusalem," "Bethlehem," "Petach Tikva," "Rishon l'sion," "Merhabiah."[20] How beautiful, how charming are these names! There, to Palestine, had my heart always attracted me.… And suddenly, America! What does the name say to my soul? What relation to me has Denver, Colorado, where I am going to?[21]

Shpall described the two groups of emigrants that he encountered on the first leg of their journey: the pioneers en route to Palestine and those immigrating to the United States. "And I belong to the second category! To the small one. I become insignificant in my own eyes."[22] But listening to others, Shpall realized that "many of the 'Americans,' like me, longed for Palestine, but for various reasons they could not attain their desire. On the other hand among the 'Palestinians' were such as would willingly go to America, but that being impossible, they go to Palestine." Speaking to his fellow travelers gave Shpall needed perspective:

> It became clear to me that everybody would rather remain at his old home. Nobody *desired* to go, but everybody had to go. We all run, or, to speak more correctly, we flee. And when somebody flees, there is no question: "Where to?" Where your feet carry you! Where you have the possibility! "Save, who can!"
>
> Yet there was a marked difference between the two categories. The Palestine pioneers were happy, joyful. The peace of God השכינה seemed to radiate from their countenances. Each of them had worked in his own way for the Zionist ideal, and now when it is destined that they be driven from their home, they go to Palestine to realize with their work, *with their life*, that ideal. An end to the diaspora! They depart from slavery to freedom. מעבדות לחרות
>
> The "Americans," on the contrary, go from one slavery to another, from one diaspora to another. This is perhaps the reason, why they are so depressed!…

> At last we all began to deplore the dreadful position of the Jews in Russia and Ukraine, the ruin of the greatest and best part of Jewry, upon which all Jews of the world put their hope, as upon the vanguard of our revival in Palestine. We came to the following conclusion: The last events in Russia and Ukraine, that had ruined in a terrible manner the largest part of the Jewish people, *must open the eyes* of all the Jews in the world to understand that (*only* then) we can be secured in the future from such ruin, *when we will have our own land*.
>
> All our hopes now should be turned to Palestine and America. As in the first, so in the second we need pioneers. In the first—to build up the land, in the second—to wake up our American brethren to give material for the building.
>
> Thus we made up a compromise: Everybody's voyage is not in vain. We all will be engaged in furthering our national aspiration. In different ways, we will work for *one* purpose.
>
> Our good humor awoke. Our faces cleared up. We promised each another [*sic*] not to haul down our national flag.…
>
> And with the song "Hope" [Ha-Tikvah] we arrived at Warsaw. There we bade each other a hearty farewell. The Palestine pioneers went to the Palestine office, and we, as American pioneers, to the "HIAS."[23]

Shpall's thinking evolves during his journey, as he copes with the anger, disappointment, envy, and pain caused by both emigration and the reality of immigrating to the United States. Shpall comes to terms with his lot by recognizing that in extreme times, one goes where one can and makes the best of life's circumstances. Rationalizing that some pioneers would work the land in Palestine, Shpall would work the mind and the spirit in the United States, influencing American Jews to support the Jewish national-cultural ideal.

Upon arrival in the United States on 6 May 1922, Shpall and his family went directly to their sponsors, his brother and sisters in Denver, Colorado. Given Shpall's aspirations, he soon grew restless in Denver. Shpall traveled to New York, where he met the Hebrew poet, Ephraim E. Lisitzky, principal of the New Orleans Communal Hebrew School. Lisitzky invited Shpall to teach in his school, and, accepting his offer, Shpall moved his family to New Orleans. He served first as teacher and later as assistant principal of the school until his death in 1935.[24]

Jews first settled in New Orleans in the early nineteenth century—a generation earlier than in Denver—and the first synagogue was organized in the 1820s. By the interwar period, despite its relatively small number of Jews, the city had a full complement of Jewish charitable, benevolent, and social organizations for men and women; about half a dozen synagogues; a Jewish hospital, the Touro Infirmary; and a weekly paper, *The Jewish Ledger*, which began publication in

1895. The communal Hebrew school was organized in 1910, but its early years were marked by frequent changes in personnel and sponsorship.[25]

Despite these Jewish amenities, cultural life in New Orleans was meager, and Shpall's decision to settle there no doubt rested primarily on the chance to work with Lisitzky in promoting Hebrew culture. Lisitzky, a noted Hebrew poet and educator, was born in Minsk in 1885 and immigrated to the United States at age fifteen. After trying out various learning environments and trades, he became principal of the Milwaukee Talmud Torah in 1916. Two years later, he moved to New Orleans to serve as principal of the New Orleans Communal Hebrew School. One of a core group of Hebrew poets in America at that time, Lisitzky remained in New Orleans for the rest of his life. Under his direction, the school developed the reputation of being one of the best of its kind in the United States.[26]

In an article[27] on Hebrew education in New Orleans, Shpall described Lisitzky as a well-known Hebrew poet and distinguished teacher. Shpall notes that Lisitzky introduced the *ivrit be-'ivrit* method of teaching[28] to the school and "achieved results in New Orleans that no one believed possible." In New Orleans, which Shpall described as being "in a remote corner far away from the center of Jewish life," Lisitzky and his teachers educated American-born children to speak, read, and write Hebrew fluently. The rigorous high school curriculum included instruction in the Hebrew language, grammar, language usage and style, Bible, Prophets, history, Aggada, rabbinics, and Hebrew literature. Students took both written and oral exams. According to Shpall, Lisitzky and his faculty succeeded because they saw education "not as a source of income but as sacred work."[29] They did not limit their work to teaching in the school; they dedicated themselves to education broadly. They offered adult education classes in the evenings, established a Young Judaea chapter to enhance the Zionist cultural education of the children, and encouraged the students to be involved in the Young Israel synagogue located next door to the school.[30]

What emerges from careful consideration of the curriculum is a school dedicated to an enlightened, traditional education. Students studied sacred Jewish texts, and Lisitzky tied the school to a synagogue, thus rooting it in traditional Jewish living. In Shpall's article one feels both his personal pride in the school and its accomplishments and his regional pride that this school put his city on the map Jewishly: "Thanks to this school, New Orleans has become the Jewish national spiritual center of the south." An exaggerated assessment, perhaps, but one that surely reflects Shpall's understanding of his work as being part of a larger project: the flowering of the nationalist-cultural movement in the United States, a movement that reached it height during the interwar period. This also helped Shpall justify his decision to work in the school and make a life in New Orleans, Louisiana.[31]

Despite his pride in and devotion to the school, Shpall, like Lisitzky,

furthered his national-cultural passions by remaining involved in the larger Hebrew and Zionist movements of the day. He kept up with Zionist affairs and continued to serve as a Hebrew correspondent even after he emigrated, contributing to *Ha-Zefirah* from the United States.[32] Shpall cultivated a group of friends who shared his Zionist longings. His wife, Shulamith, became involved in Hadassah.[33] Acting on sentiments expressed in his diary, Shpall helped raise money for Keren Kayemet (Jewish National Fund). Frustrated at the inertia of his brethren in the year after the 1929 Arab riots in Palestine, he explained: "Every one of our people in America must now get organized for holy work, to collect money for Keren Kayemet. The redemption of the land must now stand before the eyes of every Jew, every day, at every time and in every hour! Will the people fulfill the sacred obligation that is thrust upon them in this emergency?"[34]

Shpall also kept up with the political climate in the British Mandate in Palestine. For example, in the aftermath of the Arab riots, he worried about the waning British support for a Jewish state and expressed continuing support for Chaim Weizmann: [35]

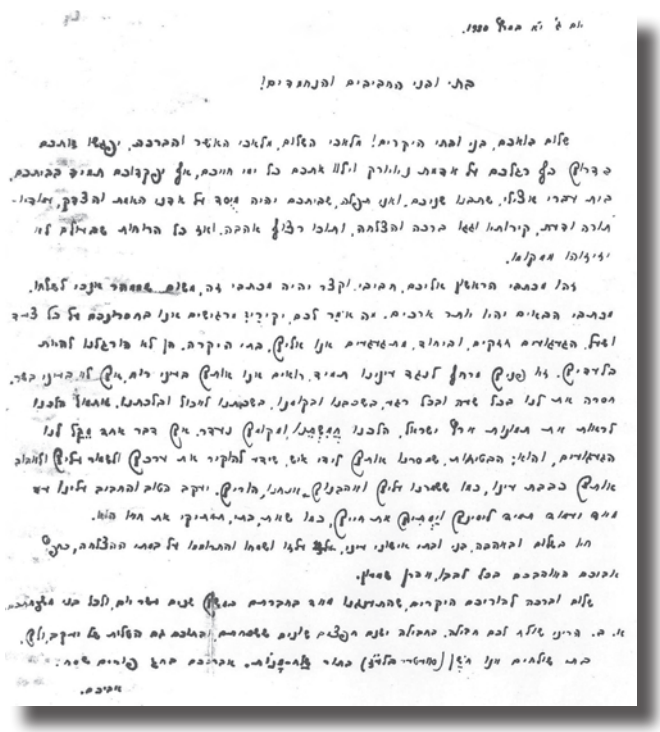
> Right now, there is no calm for Zionism. MacDonald[36] betrayed us and Weizmann is our leader. And he not only betrayed us, rather he slapped our cheeks in disgrace. In Parliament, it was openly declared that the Balfour Declaration remains valid, and that the government of England will do all that is in her power to make it a reality. This is the interpretation. But the actions are the complete opposite of the interpretation.[37] He took back 3,300 licenses that the government gave in Israel for the immigration of 3,300 pioneers. His actions angered the entire Jewish world. In all of the communities of our brethren, the Jewish people, they are organizing protest meetings against the betraying, cunning English Government. In the land of Israel on Thursday, a general strike of workers was organized as a protest against the villainy that England committed. Polish Zionists are demanding the dismissal of Weizmann. This knowledge made a great impression on me. The riots that were organized in the land of Israel last August [1929] did not disturb our calm as much as this abomination of MacDonald now.… But even so, there is no reason to lose hope. Whether the English do or don't want it, Eretz Yisrael is ours. "Because to you and your seed, I will give this land."[38] That is God's promise to Abraham, and God will fulfill His promise.[39]

Agitated that the British were making it harder for Jews to realize their nationalist dreams, Shpall found comfort by recalling God's biblical promise. Perhaps he identified with the patriarch Abraham—a pioneer in a new land sent by God to win over others to the nationalist cause.

Shpall and his friends continually dreamt about Palestine, discussing the

possibility of purchasing land and eventually settling there themselves. One Passover, in the home of family friends,

> we spent time in conversation until minha time.… [W]e spoke on the matter of traveling to Eretz Yisrael. Dr. Cohen is thinking of buying land in Eretz Yisrael and planting an orchard. Palter is also thinking about doing this. And after 4 or 5 years, they will travel there happy. On the last day of Pesah, Mr. Lisitzky, his wife, and their daughter came over, also Milikovsky and Bloch,[40] and we all spent time together until 4 o'clock. And again we spoke about the matter of travelling to Eretz Yisrael. Lisitzky also wants to buy land in "Netanya,"[41] (a moshava named for Nathan Straus[42]) and plant an orchard and make aliyah. In general, a movement arose among us to travel to Eretz Yisrael.… But we can't think about this matter, for a simple reason, that we have no money. Milikowsky['s]… full desire is that we should make aliyah. "A family like this"—he said—"must live in the Land," and America is not a place for us. But where will we find the money? Your mother is also preparing to buy an orchard, and in five or six years, she wants all of us to go to Eretz Yisrael. [43]



Letter from Aron Shimon Shpall to Jacob and Edith Pearlstein, 11 March 1930
(Courtesy Shuly Rubin Schwartz)

Shpall also poured tremendous energy into his own family—rearing children who spoke Hebrew and who were committed to furthering the nationalist movement in their own adult lives. This commitment motivated him to begin a regular regimen of writing, first to his daughter Edith and her husband Jacob Pearlstein[44] from the time of their wedding and move to New York in 1930, and subsequently to his daughter Deborah and her husband Samuel Citron, who also settled in New York.[45] Shpall wrote to them almost daily (except for the Sabbath), three

times a week in Hebrew and at other times in Yiddish,[46] and he encouraged them to write to him in Hebrew as well.

Shpall tried to ensure that Edith and Jacob would further nationalist ideals in their home not only by speaking Hebrew but also by participating in the activities of the New York Hebraist circle. Shpall and other Hebraists around the country maintained their connections to each other primarily by devouring the weekly editions of the Hebrew newspaper *Hadoar*,[47] which brought news about American Jewish life in general and the activities of the Histadrut Ivrit in specific. It also published poetry, stories, and literary criticism, while including event and life cycle notices of interest to its readers. Shpall knew that by living in New York, Edith and Jacob would be able to socialize in person with other Hebraists, and he was determined to make that happen. First and foremost, he urged them to call upon Menachem Ribalow[48]and his family. Ribalow was a leader of Histadrut Ivrit of America and editor of *Hadoar*. As Shpall recounted:

> We were so happy to hear that you spent a full hour in the company of Mr. Ribalow, who welcomed you warmly. This is a good beginning for your future life. Alas, this is my hope and desire, that you will befriend the writers and learned ones of New York, and so that the home that you build, God willing soon, will be a gathering place for intellectuals. People like this, people of high spirit, dear values; and you must get to know their friends. Therefore take advantage of their invitation and visit their home on the intermediate days of Passover. According to the words of Lisitzky, Mr. Ribalow's wife is herself an intellectual, good hearted and comfortable with people. And my strong desire is that you will get to know women like this and join their group.[49] And when the time comes and you move to your own home, invite them to you.… Mr. Lisitzky, his joy upon hearing that you visited Mr. Ribalow and spent an hour in conversation with him in Hebrew—surpassed all measure. "We have nothing to be ashamed of with our students"—he called out with enthusiasm. "Look New York at the fruits of our labors." And when I told him that you too, Jacob, my dear one, were also there and participated in the conversation, his eyes lit up with joy. What a wonderful couple! He cried out in merriment. They will build a national Hebrew home.[50]

Because of Shpall's broad interests and contacts, he also encouraged his children to connect to Yiddish writers as well as Hebrew ones.

> Go to a social gathering with Peretz Wiernik.[51] And even though I don't yet have details about this gathering, I am certain that you won't be lacking spiritual nourishment there either; rather you will meet respected people of a different kind. I gather that in this gathering, only writers in Yiddish newspapers participate. These writers, even though they write in Yiddish, are all learned, and know Hebrew well; they write in these newspapers only because that is how they make their living. The Hebrew language, to our

> regret, cannot feed a hungry belly. As of now, she is a sacred tongue that is used only for the sake of spiritual enjoyments, a bit of Sabbath pleasure like in Tel Aviv. And for the sake of making a living, a lot of our more outstanding writers… must use the weekday language. Hebrew is the language of the soul; Yiddish is the language of the body. In my opinion, the former provides food for the soul, the latter, for the body. But when Yiddish writers get together, they too occupy themselves with spiritual matters.… From the evaluation that you send me on this gathering, we'll argue about whether I am right.… I am certain that at the meeting of the Histadrut that you were invited to, even though the participants will be Hebrew writers, that is, masters of the spiritual language, despite this, they will speak there about practical matters, day-to-day matters. Because the situation of the "Hebraists" is very bad, and when they get together, they will talk about money. And that's how the positions become reversed.[52]

Conceding that Yiddishists could be intellectuals, and cognizant of how hard it was to make a living as a Hebrew writer, Shpall nevertheless made his preference for Hebrew apparent at every turn:

> The Hebrew language is different from all other languages; what is especially different is our relationship to it. In every other language that we write in, we aren't so careful about the beauty of the language; and if, on occasion, we will commit an error in grammar or style, it's of no matter. This is not the case with our language. It is called the sacred language. And our ties to it are like they are to everything sacred. Everything that we write or that we prepare to write, is with reverent awe. Even I, for whom the language flows freely from my mouth, and especially from my pen, even so, I use the language only in serious times, and even the secular subjects that I write about in this language are pulled by a thread of holiness. And if I want to recount "What's new?" matters or things that don't require close attention, I use Yiddish. In this language, I'm not careful; sooner or later, I rely on my pen. In the hours that are in Hebrew, I watch my pen, so that nothing goes out that is not corrected.[53]

Shpall relentlessly encouraged his children to improve their Hebrew, sometimes playing the role of cruel taskmaster and, at other times, overflowing with compliments about how amazing their achievements were. Since letters from the children to Shpall were not preserved, one can glean the impact he had on them only from his letters to them. Anecdotal evidence abounds about what his children actually did in their homes or how much they cared about Jewish learning and Hebrew culture in their own right. From Shpall's letters, one sees primarily the effort they expended trying to please him.[54] They made sure to tell about actions they took to advance their Jewish knowledge and facility with Hebrew. For example, he writes to them: "Good for you for reviewing the Scroll of Esther together on Purim eve. This is a good start. My advice is that you

review the weekly Torah portion each and every week, not with cantillation but with some commentary.… Review Torah together. Also learn the rest of the Bible and read Hebrew books."[55] Shpall would offer hearty praise and fierce advice in the same breath: "You have done well, reading the newspaper that you got, 'Hadoar,' together. Take it upon yourself as an obligation to do this every week."[56] And, "When will you start writing letters in Hebrew?… Yehudit's[57] spelling is a little defective, but she excels in knowledge of the language; her language is rich and vivid. Help each other, and what one lacks, the other will supply."[58] Again, it is not clear to what extent they succeeded, but Edith and Jacob reported to Shpall that they had begun reading Abraham Mapu's "Ahavat Zion" together.[59] They surely knew how happy he would be to learn this, and, in fact, he was overjoyed: "I am happy to hear that you are busy with Torah, that is in reading Hebrew books; from reading you will move on to writing, and you will occasionally write Hebrew letters, and in this way you will inherit broad knowledge of the Hebrew language."[60] Though Shpall encouraged his children to further their Jewish learning on all levels, his devotion to Hebrew culture, his "Torah," rose above all other interests.

Shpall was unrelenting in his insistence that his daughter and son-in-law strive to respond to his letters in Hebrew. The stubbornness and iron will that he believed necessary to revive the Hebrew language and the urgency and importance of the task comes through loudly in his exhortations:

> Concerning Jacob's asking my advice on how you can overcome the slovenliness that has clung to you with regard to writing letters in Hebrew, I can answer with only one word: will. Where there's a will, there's a way. You just have to decide, that once a week or once every other week, you must write a letter in Hebrew, to take it upon yourselves, to extract a promise.… I write to you three times a week: On Monday, Wednesday and Friday. And there were times when welcome and unwelcome visitors showed up at our house occasionally for visits and interfered with my letter writing, or other matters came up that could not wait for me to deal with—but I live up to my rules. I am writing my letter in its time, on Friday, in Hebrew. Look at me and do the same. You both write a beautiful Hebrew. I save Jacob's letters still, and I enjoy them. And Edith excels in the art of writing. Nothing is lacking except for will. Fortify your will, and then everything will turn out well. And the essential part is to set aside a day. On such and such a day, you must write Hebrew. And this needs to be a rule that cannot be breached.[61]

Edith and Jacob strove to emulate Shpall's example, choosing to speak Hebrew to their newborn daughter, Gilla. Shpall was overjoyed, but again offered unsolicited advice:

> I was so happy to hear that you have already started to speak Hebrew to her. Well done! But I want to know your method. Are you speaking to her *only* in this language, or are you mixing up the languages and sometimes using the Holy tongue and sometimes English? If so, you'll have nothing to show for your efforts. You will be confused, and the little one will be confused. You must make speaking Hebrew to her mandatory and not optional, fixed and not temporary. And then the little one will grow up and the language will be with her.[62]

Later, he reinforced this message: "My joy is doubled in knowing that you have gotten accustomed to turning to her only in Hebrew, and her ears absorb only the sounds of our language. Continue on this path, and you will be successful."[63]

Shpall's daughter Deborah married Samuel Citron in December 1934. Citron, a trained attorney, was also a Hebraist and later a Jewish educator. They too lived in New York City, and Shpall's letter-writing regimen expanded to include them. Shpall believed that the lives that his children led in New York vindicated his life's work, for they illustrated the success of both his school and his commitment to Hebrew in the home. (Eventually all four of his children would make their homes in New York.[64]) They were living proof to him that Hebrew could flourish in the United States, and in this way, his children fulfilled his hopes that he too would succeed as a Jewish nationalist pioneer despite having made his home in the American South and not in the Middle East.

An insatiable writer, Shpall dashed off postcards when unable to write longer letters. On his way home from his son Leo's 11 August wedding, Shpall mailed postcards from each stop. On 25 August 1935, he wrote from Baltimore that they would arrive early in Washington, DC; he joked that he felt shortchanged and ought to get a refund! On a card postmarked 10:00 AM on 26 August from Atlanta, Georgia, Shpall reported that they slept, ate, and were enjoying the trip. Later that afternoon, he sent another card from Montgomery, Alabama, noting a delay, but concluding that it was of no import.[65] Four days later, on 30 August, Shpall died of a heart attack at the age of sixty.[66]

Along with his fellow Hebraists, Shpall was buried in the *Ahiever* Society[67] section of Old Montefiore Cemetery in New York. Though he lived only thirteen years in the United States, spending the vast majority of that time in New Orleans, he nevertheless contributed to the flowering of the national Hebrew movement through his work in the school, his writings, and especially his own children. He lived to see his daughter build a life in New York filled with the values, friends, home life, and passions that he held dear. Though the Hebraist flowering in America never reached the heights that its leaders hoped it would, for a brief period of time, this movement enriched the lives of individuals like Aron Shimon Shpall, who, though living in remote Jewish communities in the United States, managed to build and sustain rich Jewish lives in the service of the Hebrew movement.

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Notes

[1]It is my honor to dedicate this article to Naomi W. Cohen, who inspired me to work in the field of American Jewish history in the very first course that I took with her when I was a sophomore in college. Her lifelong devotion to the field, rigorous standards of research, probing questions, and insightful answers taught me much over the years. Cohen's gentle prodding led me to my dissertation topic on the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, and her continuing support and encouragement have pushed me to explore new topics and perspectives in the field.

It seemed fitting that I write about my great-grandfather's Hebraist interests and his life in New Orleans for this article in Cohen's honor. The first paper I wrote in the field of American Jewish history fulfilled Cohen's assignment to examine an American Jewish newspaper as a window into Jewish life. I undertook a study of the New Orleans *Jewish Ledger*. Returning now, after many decades, to look at Jewish life in that city, I also touch on larger Hebraist circles of which Cohen and her family have been a part.

[2]Yehuda Slutsky and Judith R. Baskin, "Haskalah," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 9, 2nd ed., ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 434–444.

[3]Alan Mintz, "A Sanctuary in the Wilderness: The Beginnings of the Hebrew Movement in America in *Hatoren*," in *Hebrew in America: Perspectives and Prospects*, ed. Alan Mintz (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 30, 33; Moshe Pelli, "Ideology and Reality: The American Hebrew Movement in its Inception—In Search of Identity," *Hebrew Studies* 36 (1995): 74; idem, *Hebrew Culture in America: 80 Years of Hebrew Culture in the United States, 1916–1995* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Reshafim, 1998), v–vi; and David Mirsky and Michael Berenbaum, "Histadrut Ivrit of America," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 9, 151.

[4]Mintz, "Sanctuary," 63–64; Daniel Elazar, "The National-Cultural Movement in Hebrew Education in the Mississippi Valley," in *Hebrew in America*, 130–132; and Herman Rosenthal and Peter Wiernik, "Heder," http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=504&letter=H (accessed 23 July 2009).

[5]Shpall was my maternal grandmother's father. I have in my possession Shpall's genealogy scroll and many of the letters he wrote to my grandparents, Edith and Jacob Pearlstein. I have also read letters written to his daughter and son–in-law, Deborah and Samuel Citron. Most are in Hebrew, though he also wrote many letters in Yiddish, which I do not discuss in this paper. All cited letters below are in Hebrew unless otherwise noted, and the translations are mine.

[6]Mintz, "Sanctuary," 34; Aron Shimon Shpall, "In Our World: On Hebrew Education in New Orleans" (Hebrew), *Shevilei Ha-Hinnuch* 2 (1926–1927): 64; Bertram Wallace Korn, Edward L. Greenstein, Catherine Kahn, and Irwin Lachoff, "Louisiana," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 13, 222–224.

[7]"The Genealogy Scroll of My Mother" (Hebrew), ed. Aron Shimon Shpall (New Orleans, n.d.), personal files of author, translation mine.

[8]The following appear in *Pinkas Kremenets: sefer zikaron ha-'orekh*, ed. Abraham Samuel Stein (Tel Aviv: n.p., 1954): Yitskhak Rokhel, "Before World War I," 54–60; Yisrael Biberman, "Zionism, the Pioneer, and Immigration," trans. Steven Wien and Sari Havis, 107–109; and Manus Goldenberg, "Changing Eras," 51, http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/kremenets/kre050.html (accessed 16 July 2009).

[9]The Russian gymnasium with its cosmopolitan curriculum was the main conduit to higher education. Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 2002), 232.

[10]"Genealogy Scroll"; the following in *Pinkas Kremenets:* Rokhel, "Before World War I," 54–60; Yehuda Kenif, "'Tarbut' School," (Hebrew)137. According to Jill Aizenstein, Jews were a multilingual nation, and during this period, Hebrew co-existed with Yiddish and with the local language. Jill Havi Aizenstein, "Engaging America: Immigrant Jews in American Hebrew Literature," doctoral dissertation (New York University, 2008), 4–7.

[11]The following in *Pinkas Kremenets*: Biberman, "Zionism," 107–109; Rokhel, "Before World War I," 108–109; Yisrael Otiker, "The Pioneer ('haKhaluts') Movement," 115; and Toviya Trushinski, "Dr. Binyamin Landsberg (1890–1942)," (trans. David Dubin), 196.

[12]"Genealogy Scroll."

[13]"Genealogy Scroll"; and Polish passport of Aron Shimon Shpall, personal files of author.

[14]Shpall, "To His Excellency to the Consul of America in Warsaw," Hebrew and English translation, n.d., personal files of author.

[15]"*Keyvan she-higid, shuv aino hozer u'magid*." A quote from the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Ketubot 28b.

[16]Shpall uses the words that God utters when commanding Abram to leave his homeland. Genesis 12:1.

[17]Here, too, Shpall's Hebrew echoes the exact terminology used to describe the upheaval in Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 19:29.

[18]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 30 March 1930, personal files of author.

[19]Shpall, "From My Day-Book," n.d., personal files of author. This sole surviving eight-page entry from the diary describes Shpall's state of mind from the time he left Kremenets until he arrived in Warsaw en route to the United States. The entry is written in a beautiful handwriting in English. I suspect that, like Shpall's letter to the American Consul in Warsaw, this entry was translated by Shpall from the Hebrew.

[20]Shpall's disappointment was no doubt shaped at the local Zionist gatherings in which individuals would conjure up places in Palestine in their imaginations. As one resident recalled, "[O]n Shabbat oftentimes they would have a lecture on one of the mountains. Usually it was the mountain Vidomka in a hiding place in between the rocks. The gathering, the trip, the enjoyment of nature's surroundings, drinking fresh milk—were all integrated together. The youngsters would lie down by a spruce or a tree, and travel in their imaginations, fantasizing about village life, nature, and Eretz Yisrael." Biberman, "Zionism," 108.

[21]Shpall, "Day Book." Shpall corrects some of his spelling and usage in this letter, and there are later edits in pencil, though it is unclear whether he made these corrections. Unless otherwise noted, I have used the clearest version.

[22]In 1921, the first group of twelve immigrated to Israel from Kremenets. Khanokh Rokhel and Yitskhak Biberman, "First Group of Pioneers," 112–114.

[23]HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), an international immigrant and refugee service, was founded in New York City in 1881. Morris Ardoin, "Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 8, 620.

[24]"Genealogy Scroll"; and Shpall to N. Straus, 25 April 1928, personal files of author. The Communal Talmud Torah was first organized as the New Orleans Hebrew School in 1910. Leo Shpall, *The Jews in Louisiana* (New Orleans: Steeg Print. & Pub. Co., 1936), 24.

[25]Shpall, *Jews in Louisiana*, 18–29; Richard Gottheil and Peter Wiernik, "Jewish Ledger, The," in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=281&letter=J (accessed 6 July 2009); Catherine Kahn and Irwin Lachoff, "New Orleans," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 15, 152–153.

[26]Eisig Silberschlag, "Lisitzky, Ephraim E.," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 13, 81; Ephraim E. Lisitzky, *In the Grip of Cross-currents*, trans. Moshe Kohn and Jacob Sloan, revised by the author (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1959), 66–300; Mintz, "Sanctuary," 46; and Elazar, "The National-Cultural Movement," 137.

[27]Shpall, "In Our World," 64–67 (translations mine).

[28]This method was pioneered in the United States by Samson Benderly in Baltimore. He then introduced it in New York when he served as first director of the city's Bureau of Jewish Education beginning in 1910.

[29]Shpall is alluding to a verse from *Ethics of the Fathers* (4:7): "Rabbi Tzadok taught: Do not make Torah an ornament for self-aggrandizement nor a means for livelihood."

[30]Shpall, "In Our World," 64–67.

[31]Ibid; Aizenstein, "Engaging America," 8. According to Jane Ravid, who was a student at the school, by the 1940s the school had difficulty achieving its goals because of disinterested students who had little interest in speaking Hebrew. Phone conversation with Jane Ravid, 16 July 2009.

[32]Shpall to N. Straus, 25 April 1928, personal files of author; Isaac Remba, "The Hebrew Press in Poland between the World Wars," in *Di Yidishe prese vos iz geven* (Yiddish), ed. David Flinker, M. Tsanin, Shalom Rosenfeld, Moshe Ron (Tel Aviv, n.d.), 370; Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 22 April 1930, personal files of the author. *Ha-Zefirah* ("The Dawn") was a Hebrew paper that appeared in Warsaw intermittently between 1862 and 1931. Founded as a weekly in 1862, it was the only Hebrew paper of its kind during the 1860s and 1870s. By the 1880s under the editorship of Nahum Sokolow, the paper enjoyed a wide circulation, attracting readers both among the maskilim and the Hasidim. After the First Zionist Congress, *Ha-Zefirah* was firmly Zionist in orientation. The paper appeared intermittently in the 1920s and ceased publication in 1931. Getzel Kressel, "Ha-Zefirah," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 8, 495.

[33]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 16 January 1931 and 8 Adar Sheni 5692 [16 March 1932], personal files of author.

[34]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 12 December 1930, personal files of author.

[35]Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952) was the first president of the State of Israel, president of the (World) Zionist Organization (1920–1931 and 1935–1946), and a distinguished scientist. He played an instrumental role in persuading the British government to issue the Balfour Declaration in 1917. However, by 1930, the British abandonment of its obligations toward the Zionists led Weizmann to resign his office and caused a wave of public protest. British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald acknowledged the magnitude of this public dissent by sending a letter to Weizmann in which he renewed the main assurances that Zionists considered essential to mandatory policy. Abba Eban and Samuel Aaron Miller, "Weizmann, Chaim," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 20, 744–752. For more on the reaction of the Jewish community to the riots, see Naomi W. Cohen *The Year After the Riots: American Responses to the Palestine Crisis of 1929–30* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988).

[36]Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald was the first Labour Party prime minister of Great Britain. He served in the Labour governments of 1924 and 1929–1931 and in the national coalition government of 1931–1935. "Ramsay MacDonald," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/354108/Ramsay-MacDonald (accessed 31 July 2009).

[37]Shpall is turning the idiom from *Ethics of the Fathers* (1: 17)—"Not study but doing mitzvot is the essence of virtue"—on its head.

[38]Paraphrase of Genesis 26:3.

[39]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 23 May 1930, personal files of author.

[40]Family friends.

[41]Shpall vocalizes this word, perhaps suspecting that his children might not yet be familiar with it. The town was founded in 1929.

[42]Nathan Straus (1848–1931) was a merchant and philanthropist who was deeply devoted to Palestine and gave a great deal of his fortune to support various projects there. Naomi W. Cohen, Hanns G. Reissner, and Ruth Beloff, "Straus," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 19, 248–250.

[43]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 22 April 1930, personal files of author.

[44]Jacob Pearlstein learned Hebrew at The Jewish Theological Seminary's Teachers Institute. He graduated in 1920, subsequently attending medical school in New Orleans at Tulane University. He met Edith during his years as a medical student, no doubt being drawn to the Shpall family because of their mutual interests in Hebrew culture. He graduated Tulane in 1927; Jacob and Edith married on 2 March 1930.

[45]Shpall had already begun writing Hebrew letters to Samuel during the engagement period.

[46]I examined only the Hebrew letters for this article. A comparison of the two would no doubt yield proof of Shpall's philosophy that the two languages served different functions.

[47]*Hadoar*, a Hebrew weekly newspaper, was published by the Histadrut Ivrit from1923 until 2005. It was the only Hebrew weekly in the Diaspora to be published regularly without interruption. Mirsky and Berenbaum, "Histadrut Ivrit of America," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 9, 151.

[48]Menachem Ribalow (1895–1953) was a Hebrew editor and essayist. Born in Chudnov, Volhynia, Ribalow immigrated to the United States in 1921. Two years later he was appointed editor of the Hebrew weekly *Hadoar*. Eisig Silberschlag, "Ribalow, Menachem" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 17, 279–280.

[49]Shpall consistently demonstrated how much he recognized the important role women played in furthering Hebraism.

[50]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 2 April 1930, personal files of author.

[51]Peter Wiernik was editor of *Der Morgen Zhurnal*, New York City's only morning Yiddish newspaper.

[52]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 28 April 1930, personal files of author.

[53]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 9 July 1930, personal files of author.

[54]One measure of the children's reverence for Aron Shimon can be seen in the fact that each of the four children named one of their sons "Aron Shimon" to honor his memory.

[55]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 19 March 1930, personal files of author.

[56]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 23 March 1930, personal files of author.

[57]"Yehudit" was Edith's Hebrew name.

[58]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 19 March 1930, personal files of author.

[59]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 2 January 1931, personal files of author. Abraham Mapu (1808–1867) was a Lithuanian novelist who wrote in Hebrew. For many years an impoverished, itinerant schoolmaster, Mapu was a gained financial security when he was appointed teacher in a government school for Jewish children. Mapu is considered the creator of the Hebrew novel. Influenced by French romantic literature, he wrote heavily plotted novels about life in ancient Palestine, which he contrasted favorably with nineteenth-century Jewish life. His style is fresh and poetic, almost biblical in its simple grandeur. The novel appeared in 1853. "Abraham Mapu," in *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1E1-Mapu-Abr.html (accessed 2 July 2009).

[60]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 9 January 1931, personal files of author.

[61]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 2 January 1931, personal files of author.

[62]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, Erev Rosh Hodesh Adar Sheni 5692 [7 March 1932], and Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 9 Nissan 1932 [15 April 1932], personal files of author.

[63]Shpall to Edith and Jacob Pearlstein, 9 Nissan 1932 [15 April 1932], personal files of author.

[64]Leo Shpall was an educator and American Jewish historian who published many articles in the field. He and his wife Jean moved to New York after Aron Shimon's death. Gila, only sixteen when her father died, eventually married Leon Lantz. A dentist by profession, he was a Hebrew poet by avocation. Both Gila and Deborah taught in afternoon Hebrew schools in the New York area for many decades. They and their husbands also spoke Hebrew to their children.

[65]Shpall to Jacob Pearlstein, 25 August 1935; Shpall to Samuel Citron, 26 August 1935 (9:00 AM); and Shpall to Samuel Citron, 26 August 1935 (3:00 PM), personal files of Sharon Citron Urbas.

[66]*Jewish Ledger* (6 September 1935): 8. This article states that Shpall was fifty-five at the age of his death; however, born in 1975, Shpall was sixty when he died.

[67]This society was founded in 1905 in New York and dedicated to the dissemination of the new Hebrew literature in America. A note to Menachem Ribalow implored him to "make every effort to get burial on Achiever cemetery." Undated, personal files of Sharon Citron Urbas. Mintz, "Sanctuary," 33; Ezra Spicehandler, "Ameriqa'iyut in American Hebrew Literature," in *Hebrew in America,* 73; *Hadoar* (6 September 1935): 685; and *Der Morgen Zhurnal* (3 September 1935): 3.

The Depth of Ethnicity: Jewish Identity and Ideology in Interwar New York City

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More than thirty years ago, I was privileged to have the most outstanding American Jewish historian of her era, Professor Naomi W. Cohen, mentor me as a dissertation advisor. It is a testament to Professor Cohen's wide interest in all aspects of our field—not to mention her generosity as the paradigmatic teacher—that she assumed an advisory role on a specific research theme that did not correspond to her own scholarly agenda. She was renowned—as she still is today—for her work on American Zionism, organized Jewish defense activities in this country, and Jewish status in Christian America, as well as the saga of nineteenth century central European migration and life in the United States. And, of course, she continues to produce in these areas—a model for us all. In any event, one of the central thrusts of my work on the Jewish community of Harlem was to look at the applicability of the Chicago School of Sociology's long-standing understanding—they wrote back in the 1920s—of the complexities of intergenerational and intracity Jewish migration to the metropolitan area experience. Among my most salient findings—which took on long-established scholars, most notably Louis Wirth, author of *The Ghetto*—was that the immigrants' and their children's movement out of the downtown hubs of intense Jewish life did not necessarily lead to a decline of group identity. Rather, I argued that to the degree that resettlement in new sections of the city "was conducive to rapid Americanization, they were also hospitable to the maintenance and even the strengthening of Jewish identification." In that regard, I emphasized the role of new "social and religious forms of American Judaism" in the persistence of group belonging.[1]

As such, my efforts dovetailed with the historiographical contributions of other American Jewish historians of my generation—most importantly, Deborah Dash Moore. She argued that second-generation Jews in the New York neighborhoods that attracted Jews in the 1920s—after Harlem declined—were homes to the emergence of new forms of ethnic identification. She pointedly noted—as I had done—modern religious innovations among other formal indicators of involvement, even as she accounted for the wellsprings of informal neighborhood relations that promoted Jewish continuity.[2]

In the years that followed, I moved away from studies that focused on neighborhood life even as I deepened my interest and understanding of the ways America's religious Jews—through their synagogues, rabbis, leaders, and lay people—adjusted to, or opposed, the American social conditions around them. Currently, however, I am returning to the scene of my earliest efforts—the streets of New York—with an eye toward ascertaining how deeply committed interwar Jews were to Jewish values, causes, and movements; i.e., forms of

identification that transcended the friendly linkages that were part of ongoing neighborhood existence.[3]

As we will see—as I am rethinking what "maintenance and even the strengthening of Jewish identification" truly means—those in the neighborhoods were divided between the majority, whose Jewishness was rooted in their daily mundane associations, and a minority of activists who sought to lead all others to staunch ideological commitments.

There is no question that New York Jews of the interwar period lived together, worked at the same jobs and industries, attended the same public schools—with the fortunate ones continuing together mostly at the city's municipal colleges—and above all, bumped into each other incessantly, if not happily, on the streets of the several neighborhoods that they called their homes. Memoirs and oral recollections of Jews from that time and place show unequivocally that they felt their entire world was well-nigh Jewish.

That was clearly the vision that William Poster, future author and poet destined to write dance and film criticism for *The New York Times* and *The New York Herald Tribune*, had of his upbringing on Brownsville's Pitkin Avenue. He would later reflect that up to the age of twelve, Brownsville boys like him, "never really felt that the Jews were anything but an overpowering majority of the human race." So insular was their vision that they even believed that great American heroes such as "George Washington, Nathan Hale, Tom Mix, Babe Ruth and Jack Dempsey" had to be Jewish, too. Within that atmosphere, Poster's tightest ethnic linkage was his neighborhood club—a group we might call a "victimless street gang."[4]

Concomitantly, another Brownsville boy, Alfred Kazin, who would achieve even greater renown in the world of letters, saw that same neighborhood not only as a home—where "men would stand around for hours, smoking, gossiping, boasting of their children, until it was time to go home for the great Sabbath mid-day meal"—but as a mecca apart from the metropolis. For him, "we were of the city, but somehow not in it.… I saw New York as a foreign city… that the two were joined in me I never knew." Ultimately, however, Kazin perceived Brownsville as "notoriously a place that measured all success by our skill in getting away from it."[5]

During this same era, Adolph Schayes, who would find fame in a very different arena, also felt that his world, centered in the West Bronx, was essentially all Jewish. The son of Romanian immigrant parents, "Dolph" was born in 1928 and grew up on Davidson Avenue and 183rd Street, off Fordham Road and near Jerome Avenue. Decades later, Schayes would recall that "as a kid I thought everyone was Jewish." Schayes had good reason to feel that way. Though in 1930 and 1940 Jews constituted but approximately 45 percent of the so-called "Fordham" section of the borough and shared the region with the Irish, everywhere Schayes turned he saw Jews and Jewishness around him.[6]

His peer group growing up was the "Trylons," an informal neighborhood street club made up almost entirely of Jews, with a "token Irish" youngster. When they were not playing kick-the-can or stickball, these fellows would simply hang out together, "meeting and talking." As a teenager, Dolph graduated into a successor club, another all-Jewish contingent called the "Amerks," which played more organized games against other Jewish outfits and opponents from other ethnic groups. His consummate neighborhood turf was the local asphalt-covered playgrounds, where he honed basketball skills that would hold him in good stead at Mosholu Parkway's De Witt Clinton High School and earn him a scholarship to New York University. He would stay basically at home—the uptown campus of NYU was then situated merely a short bus ride away, at University Heights—until he began capitalizing on his athletic prowess in the early postwar years, as one of the great early stars of the National Basketball Association.

Schayes's Jewishness also extended to his large family; once a month, his aunts and uncles would meet at his parents' home, or he and his family would trek to meet the clan in Brooklyn. The elders would play cards, dine on his mother's Romanian delicacies, and perhaps speak of their affection for the "liberal" policies of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, whom they revered.

Significantly—and we shall return to this dimension—none of Schayes's Jewish connections were tied to any sort of formal Jewish organizational life. He knew, as a youth, of synagogues in his neighborhood—the large Concourse Center of Israel and some other storefront shuls—where some locals received Talmud Torah training. But neither he nor his club friends ever set foot in these religious institutions. His neighborhood friends, his school, and his family provided him with all of the Jewish identification that he needed or wanted.[7]

Elsewhere in the Bronx during the 1930s, Crotona Park was, for Irving Fier, the place to be not only to recreate—as Schayes might have done—but a romantic preserve perfect for liaisons with the opposite sex. When Irving was not working in his father's dairy business, the teenager relaxed in the great park, perhaps lounging with picnickers on "a big lawn that thousands shared." Fier has reminisced that it was there that he had his first date. "If you wanted to make out, you walked through the park to Tremont Avenue, got a soda and then walked back." In time, the young man regularized his romantic routine, but apparently so did other amorous Jewish boys and girls. A search for privacy ultimately brought Irving and his date to the intimacy of her apartment lobby.[8]

For fortunate youths who did not have to work on Saturday to help support their families, the afternoon Sabbath promenade was a perfect time and place to hatch plans for an evening out. One observer of the Grand Concourse scene—the neighborhood corridor that acted as a pathway for young and old to walk between home and synagogue—in the 1930s would report on "a Jewish crowd passing in endless procession," seeing and being seen by one another. The

major Jewish holidays, most notably the High Holidays, intensified pedestrian traffic, turning Wilkins Street, near Crotona Park, into "the Rosh ha-Shanah gathering place, for the neighborhood." A comparable organic propinquity convinced young Lillian Elkin that "the entire world was Jewish." When she too grew up in Brownsville, she used to feel sorry for her Polish janitor because "he did not share my holiday." At that juncture, she "did not realize that I was a minority and he was the majority."[9]

During the summer months, public beaches beckoned Jewish crowds. For Bronxites, 1934 was a particularly special season, as Orchard Beach, in the northeast corner of their borough, was opened for the first time for swimming, land sports, and socializing. Youngsters flocked to this outlet, which rivaled the Rockaways in Queens and Coney Island in Brooklyn as popular destinations. Indeed, these free and healthy settings were known as Jewish spaces. As one contemporary survey indicated: "On a normal hot Sunday or holiday these public beaches hold more than a million and a half persons. It is by no means stretching the probability to say that more than half of those come from the Jewish quota of the population."[10]

For a considerable number of occupationally aspiring and educationally achieving young adults, the next Jewish nexus was the classrooms, cafeterias, and alcoves of the city's colleges and universities, particularly its municipal-run institutions. For most of these first-generation college students, a combination of both prejudice and penuriousness directed them to local schools of higher education, where they would predominate and their influence would pervade undergraduate life. At that point in American history, informal and formal quota systems severely limited the numbers of Jews who might attend this nation's elite schools. The paltry and declining numbers of Jewish admissions to the Ivy Leagues in the 1920s and 1930s chilled the dreams of many high school valedictorians. Even if a youngster applied under a pseudonym and fibbed in answering other personal information questions, his Eastern Parkway address, a photograph that revealed to close-looking admissions officers his "semitic features," and his Boys High School transcript were dead giveaways.[11]

Concomitantly, New York University, taking some cues from the Ivy Leagues, tendered a decidedly mixed reception to Jews. Two journalists who surveyed 1920s and early 1930s antisemitism said that school "represent[ed] probably the most striking dualism, a house divided against itself, to be found in the academic world." The school possessed a bucolic Bronx campus, a preserve set apart from the larger city, founded in 1894—before the borough became so Jewish—"as a men's country college, with the good old American collegiate spirit."(Women would not be admitted to this enclave until the late 1950s.) However, the so-called "old guard at NYU" saw their quiet, "retired hill-top" world changed and, to their minds, undermined in the 1910s when "aliens," many of them Jews, began attending uptown. Not only did these invaders of

the Heights lack the proper breeding—renowned and racist sociologist Henry Pratt Fairchild was a faculty eminence—but these Jews were identified with unpatriotic, socialist radicalism. Anxious to restore its "proper" racial-religious balance, school officials in the early 1920s instituted "personal and psychological" tests—essential for weeding out Jews. Quickly, during the early and mid-1920s, the Jewish percentages at the College of Arts and Pure Science dropped from nearly 50 percent to less than 30 percent. When Schayes applied in the mid-1940s, receptivity toward Jews had improved. The exigencies of Depression economics helped as NYU, strapped for funds, looked to attract more tuition-paying students with less regard for their origins. But then again, Dolph also was an ideal candidate. Not only was he a fine student, but he was a nationally regarded athlete. One of the persistent canards leveled against Jewish students was that they lacked good old American collegiate spirit because they were not varsity men. Dolph Schayes would become an All-American basketball star.[12]

The "other" NYU—particularly its undergraduate Colleges of Commerce and Education and its Washington Square College, situated in Greenwich Village, where the school first began back in the 1830s—was always far more hospitable to Jewish men and women. Most notably, in the 1920s, James Buell Munn, dean of the liberal arts college, Washington Square, spoke warmly of a mission to provide children of immigrants of both genders—women were part of the mix from the opening of his school in 1914—with "natural cultural opportunities" within in his school; he considered it a "laboratory" for inculcating American values while pupils strived to fashion productive careers. Whether or not this assimilatory message resonated with Jewish undergraduates, they understood that they were welcomed downtown.[13] Still, for most college-bound Jews of this era, the academic place to be was within the city's own municipal college, most notably, City College of New York (CCNY), "the Cheder [Jewish school] on the Hill"—that is, St. Nicholas Heights in Upper Manhattan.[14]

These "sturdy sons"—as the school's alma mater described them—from families that could not afford tuition did not care that antisemitic rhetoric defined their school's acronym as "College of the Circumcised Citizens of New York." CCNY was their "Proletarian Harvard." It has been estimated that in the interwar period, close to 90 percent of the student enrollment at CCNY was Jewish. Those who got in were proud and grateful of its century-old tradition of being a tuition-free school and were always ready, understandably, to do what was necessary to protect that distinctiveness. NYU, seemingly by contrast, was out of reach of the most indigent families. In the 1923 to 1924 academic year, the registration fee and tuition amounted to $245. Ten years later, during the depths of the Depression, it cost $360 to attend the downtown school. With reportedly a twenty-dollar-a-week salary constituting a "good job" and a shipping clerk in the garment center garnering but fifteen dollars a week, these were steep numbers indeed.[15]

Future award-winning *New York Times* editor A.M. Rosenthal may have captured the decision-making processes of most of his CCNY contemporaries best when he recalled that, "when I was a senior at De Witt Clinton High school"—he graduated six years before Schayes—"I had absolutely no conversations with any of my classmates or with my parents about what college I would enter or try to enter." For this Depression-era youth, "there was only one choice. You either got into City College or you looked for a job in the Post Office."[16] Jewish women who were then enrolled in Hunter College in Yorkville undeniably harbored similar sentiments; they constituted 80 percent to 90 percent of that student body. Poor Jews predominated to the same degree at Brooklyn College, which opened its doors in 1930 to both male and female students in the Midwood section of that borough.[17]

Although most day session students took a complete load of semester courses, in a sense many of them were not exactly "full-time" students. Living at home, commuting to school, they rushed back to the neighborhood and to their places of employment with no time for undergraduate hijinks or even for more serious extracurricular activities. "Around CCNY," wrote one chronicler of college life in 1929, "there flock no romantic legends. There are no dormitories here.… No voices group under a moonlit elm to sing the glories of the College and the bullfrog on the bank." The reality was, he observed, "students are here a few hours and they are sucked back into the city from which they come."[18]

Like their brothers at CCNY, college life was also highly transitory for many young women who attended Hunter. A 1938 college report revealed that such "girls spend more than half as much time in their 'underground campus'—the subways—as they do in classes, lectures and laboratories." It was determined that a student who resided in Brooklyn "puts in forty minutes in trains, buses and trolleys for every sixty minutes she attends classes." During such trips, women students at Hunter and at Brooklyn College reportedly perfected "the art of studying while straphanging." Chivalry was not alive and well beneath the city streets. "Even with the help of an armful of books and a weary countenance," none of the Hunter co-eds interviewed "could remember having had a seat offered her more than twice."[19]

After graduation, those with degrees did not necessarily break out of their old neighborhoods. They often lined up with those who did not go to college in the circumscribed workplaces available to Jews, maintaining the organic ethnic ties. A Brooklyn College man who joined the police force after college recollected that "in the 1930s, when there was a Depression on, the biggest factor in anyone's life was job security. So I guess it was everyone's duty at that time to take every civil service exam that came along." In his case, he became one of 1,200 appointees out of 38,000 college and high school graduates who scored on the exam.[20]

While most of these young people were very content with their levels of Jewish engagement, all centered around their neighborhood hubs and inter-

twined day-to-day associations—a minority of the deeply dedicated wanted more Jewish commitment out of their fellow children of immigrants. Religious leaders of the faith's several movements, radicals of differing stripes, and Zionists anxious to strengthen their footholds in America—each in his or her own way wanted the streets of Jewish New York, not to mention its college campuses, to be ideological strongholds. While historians have identified specific textures for different neighborhoods—for example, it has been said that the Bronx was for radicals, Borough Park belonged to the Zionists, Williamsburg was the place for the Orthodox—in reality their ideas and approaches did not sink deeply into their streets' concrete. To the leaders' frequent consternation, they found that the masses they hoped to lead were only episodically interested in the activists' messages. Rather, they tendered tentative, intermittent assent to the causes, essentially when the leaders' messages touched their gut needs and emotions.[21]

On the religious front, youngsters showed much disinterest in synagogue life. For example, the "eighty-three synagogues… and dozens of Hebrew and Yiddish schools" that were crowded into less than two square miles of Brownsville were usually empty. Seats were not filled because few boys, as a memoirist has pointed out, "continued their Jewish education or frequented synagogues past the age of thirteen." A 1940 neighborhood survey confirmed these impressions. It determined that "only nine percent of adult males in Brownsville attended a synagogue with any regularity." While the High Holidays witnessed closed stores, empty public schools, and thousands promenading in the afternoon, in an enclave where every informal tie bespoke Jewishness, more folks stood outside the synagogues than prayed within.[22]

Although religious leaders of all Jewish movements bemoaned the sight of empty seats in their sanctuaries, Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan unquestionably proffered the most creative solution to this very troubling dilemma. Although he was not the first to hit on the concept that young people could be attracted to the sanctuary through various ancillary portals, his "Synagogue Center" popularized the strategy that those who came to play might, in time, be convinced to stay to pray. His initial home base was The Jewish Center, founded in 1917 in the then-new, up–and-coming West Side.[23]

The formula called for the translation of the synagogue into "a synagogue center… where all the members of the family would feel at home during the seven days of the week. There they could sing and dance and play.…" The notion of the week-long synagogue was now activated. The trick was to sustain that social momentum and to bring participants home as more religiously committed Jews. Israel Levinthal, a Kaplan disciple and, beginning in the 1920s, rabbi at the Brooklyn Jewish Center, believed there was "magic" in this methodology. It would come into play when a "young man, entering the gymnasium class, would notice the announcement on the bulletin board that

on the next evening a meeting would be held in the interest of Jewish refugees or for relief." With his interest aroused, he would come to that meeting. The chair would announce that on the coming Friday evening, the rabbi would speak on a particular subject—an announcement intended to, again, arouse interest. The young man would then attend the services and, if they appealed to him, he would come again.[24]

This "pray through play" posture became the communal calling card of a string of interwar synagogue centers in New York, from the Jacob H. Schiff Center and Temple Adath Israel in the Grand Concourse region of the Bronx to the Brooklyn and Ocean Parkway Jewish Centers, all of which were tied personally or ideologically to their teacher and leader.[25]

However, for all of Kaplan's and his followers' enthusiasm, this endeavor fell short of inculcating staunch religious allegiances. The naysayers who questioned from the outset whether athletes or artists or dancers or music lovers would find their way from these secular Jewish venues to holy precincts surely had a point. Brooklyn rabbi Harry Weiss, for one, believed that those who attended the fun and games part of Jewish life were wont to "feel that… [their] duty towards a Congregation is full performed and the Friday night and Saturday morning services are of necessity neglected." If anything during the 1930s, with so many people with time on their hands, synagogue centers became even more popular as secular Jewish retreats. From 1931 to 1935, "more than four thousand new members came to use the gymnasium" at the Brooklyn Jewish Center, and others flocked to the many other recreational and cultural activities. But there was no concomitant rise of religious attendance. In the Bronx, Schiff Center officials could speak of four thousand Jews attending High Holiday services, not to mention those who, as always, congregated outside. But during the year it was the same old story of half-empty sanctuaries.[26]

These realities were not lost on Kaplan, who acknowledged in 1935 that "at first I thought if the synagogue were transformed into a center that would house the leisure activities of our people, the problem of Jewish life in this country would be solved."[27] But such had yet to be proven. Throughout the interwar period, his initiative really only produced one more comfortable venue for Jews to interact with each other. They took their strong neighborhood ties indoors, as powerful ongoing personal relationships were sustained.

Radical groups had greater expectations that their efforts would increase staunch support for their causes among the Jewish rank and file, and they did not have to seek out the neighborhood masses. Their several cooperative apartment endeavors—especially in the Bronx—had brought potential comrades into daily contact with those who preached world-changing ideologies. But even though many of these potential comrades benefited from the environment and were grateful for its social services, they generally did not become activists unless the campaign touched them very personally.

For example, house painter Louis Myerson and his wife Bella were among the original owners of the Sholom Aleichem co-ops on Sedgwick Avenue. In time, nine other family members—siblings and in-laws—joined them. As working-class Jews, they were somewhat distrustful of the capitalist system and were taken with radical rhetoric. The Myersons inculcated an affinity for these values within their three daughters, Helen, Sylvia, and Bess, whom they sent "consecutively" to the two Yiddishist schools on the co-op premises after the neighborhood public schools let out. One "schule" was socialist and the other communist, but the girls hardly learned the differences. They received little clarification at home as, reportedly, Louis Myerson's "political policy was to participate in everything and commit to nothing." Bess once quipped that her father joined "the IWO" (the Communist International Workers Organization) "because of its excellent burial program." He stayed clear of the great debates that roiled the co-op, such as the battle royale that ensued between the communists and socialists, particularly the Labor Zionists, over the 1929 Arab riots in Palestine. The Stalinists backed the Arabs, the Zionists supported the Jews. A biographer of the Myerson family has suggested that Louis's position—or non position, as it were—was "common among thoughtful moderates," individuals whom Irving Howe has described as "non-party leftist(s) engaged in cultural activities."[28]

There was, however, one gut issue that hit home and stirred the Myersons to action. In 1932, a year after the co-op went bankrupt and was sold to private investors, forty tenants were tossed out of their apartments for nonpayment of rent. It was then that the three sisters, surely with parental assent, worked the picket lines as a rent strike, championed by radical leaders, erupted on Sedgwick Avenue. Beyond that, the elders and youngsters alike helped out their neighbors, ensuring that "no coop member ever wandered homeless."[29]

There certainly were youngsters who were fully swept up with the drama, excitement, and promises of the leftist movements that arose from those Bronx streets—youngsters who dreamed of influencing their fellows and ultimately changing the world. Irving Howe, one of the most iconic of these youths, has recounted how having grown up in the "Jewish slums of the East Bronx.… I wandered into the ranks of the Socialist youth and from then on, all through my teens and twenties, the Movement was my home and passion, the Movement as it ranged through the various left-wing, anti-Communist groups." Here, too, those of a distinct bent felt secure amid their own kind; these sons and daughters of immigrants lived where "the Jews still formed a genuine community reaching half-unseen into a dozen neighborhoods and a multitude of institutions, within the shadows of which we found protection of a kind." Notwithstanding this "protective aura," those youths who ached to be heard needed to earn their street credits with the real laborers of their parents' generation. "You might be shouting at the top of your lungs against reformism or Stalin's betrayal," Howe

would recall, "but for the middle-aged garment worker strolling along Southern Boulevard, you were just a bright and cocky Jewish boy, a talkative little *pisher*." Only on occasion would they venture out of their home base to preach their gospels to other, often unreceptive groups, such as the tough Irish kids on Fordham Road. They did better talking up social justice issues to poor blacks in Harlem.[30]

The young Daniel Bell, the future social theorist and later a professor of social sciences at Harvard, first learned of socialism at home, as his mother was a member of the Ladies Garment Workers Union, always voted the Socialist Party line, and read *The Jewish Daily Forward* "religiously." By thirteen, her son was ready to tell the rabbi who had trained him for his bar mitzvah, "I found the truth. I don't believe in God. I'll put on *tefillin* (phylacteries) once in memory of my dead father, but that's all. I'm joining the Young Socialists League." The rabbi apparently retorted, "Yingle (literally little boy, a cleaned-up version of 'pisher'), you don't believe in God. Tell me, you think God cares?" Though divorced from the faith and angered by the rabbi's retort, Bell would later admit that he gleaned much methodologically from the tradition. Soon, he was applying "the same kind of thinking you learned" in analyzing the Bible or Talmud to "Marx's Torah." And as a teenage member of Young Peoples' Socialist League (YPSL), he and his comrades went from corner to corner on the streets of his Lower East Side neighborhood "with a sort of stepladder and [began] gathering a crowd until the main speaker would come along and talk." Bell was usually the first one up the ladder and spoke for about ten minutes.[31]

Howe, Bell, and other doctrinaire advocates of many and competing stripes reached their full potential as CCNY students. Their hubs were the alcoves of the school's cafeteria, where they held sway, ready and anxious to convince all who might pass by of the rightness of their causes, always hopeful of recruiting followers to join them in their on- and off-campus campaigns. This indoor Jewish street possessed many kiosks, each staffed by competing ideologists who engaged in legendary debates with Jewish advocates positioned provocatively in the next alcove. One memoirist has recalled that Alcove #1 was the province of a mix of "right-wing Socialists… to splinters from the Trotskyist left wing" to an even more "bewildering" array of "Austro-Marxists, orthodox Communists, Socialist centrists," not to mention "all kinds of sympathizers, fellow travelers, and indeterminists." When these debaters were not battling among themselves—starting with a civil call, "Let's discuss the situation," and proceeding into shouting matches—this politically heterogeneous combine was at intellectual combat with those in Alcove #2, the home of the pro-Stalinist Young Communist League, headed by Julius Rosenberg.[32]

For those who took up the cudgels for their deeply felt convictions, the alcove arena was more important than any class. Howe showed his priorities through a "device of checking in at the beginning of a class when a teacher took attendance… and then slipping out to the bathroom and coming back at

the end of the hour and meanwhile spending that hour in the alcove."[33] Howe and his confreres—which included, among others, Bell (class of 1939), Irving Kristol (1940), and Nathan Glazer (1944)—would there hone skills as debaters and dialecticians, which would hold them in good stead throughout their lives as major American Jewish intellectuals. Indeed, these self-assured men would eventually be lionized, if not revered, as the "New York Intellectuals," renowned political thinkers and cultural arbitrators even if, over their long careers as writers and social commentators, they altered their views of society's destiny.[34] Even then, as they held forth from their cafeteria soapboxes, these advocates were voices to reckon with on campus. They were an attraction to many students who gravitated to the alcoves to listen in on a point well struck. "When that happened," one veteran of these battles has recalled, "a crowd gathered around the contestants, the way kids do, waiting for a fight to explode. But there were no fist fights, even when the provocations seemed unbearable." However, when the noise and excitement died down—debaters were known to engage one another "at the top of [their] lungs"—the masses of listeners who did not share the depth of the debaters' universal concerns drifted away to their worldly pursuits, either to classes or to part-time jobs.[35] According to Kristol, although 85 percent to 90 percent of the students were from working-class Jewish backgrounds that possessed some degree of radicalism in their traditions, "most were passive political.… The active types numbered in the hundreds."[36]

This endemic passivity was particularly frustrating to those radicals who sought to energize the campus, to take their fights out of the alcoves and into the streets within and beyond CCNY. Future renowned Marxist economist Harry Magdoff was one such instigator. This Bronx-born house painter's son came from a home environment "in which the class problems—unemployment, seasonal unemployment, negotiations, problems of the union"—were the talk around the kitchen table. His first formal exposure to radical teachings took place at his local Sholom Aleichem school, where the literature of the European left was imparted in Yiddish. Acting on these inculcated beliefs—fostered daily through his reading of the Yiddish press—he was, already as a high school student, agitating among his classmates to take class conflict seriously. So disposed, when he enrolled at CCNY in 1931, he immediately joined Alcove #2, Communist, Social Problems Club, and became an editor of the organization's magazine *Frontiers* (albeit without college administrative approval). A year later, in 1932, he went off-campus to be part of the inauguration of the National Students League and the Youth League Against War and Fascism. However, Magdoff has admitted that he and his comrades often stood alone. All of his efforts—starting with that unauthorized magazine and culminating with his heated opposition to autocratic CCNY President Robinson—would ultimately lead to his expulsion; he finished his bachelor's of arts at NYU. The reality was that, while many students were sympathetic to his campaigns, in the end the

vast majority was focused on preparing for careers at a school that was, as this campus activist once put it, "horrendously competitive, terribly competitive in terms of class work." Moreover, many impoverished students—even those who understood the issues as Magdoff saw them—simply did not have spare time to hang around for rallies and protests when part-time jobs hung over their heads. Still, men like Magdoff soldiered on. As one of his non-Marxist contemporaries at CCNY would later observe, with some degree of admiration: "Communists in the student body, although only a handful… were the most dedicated and aggressive missionaries—challenging teachers and deans whenever the occasion presented itself but concentrating especially and relentlessly on skeptical and/or indifferent fellow students."[37]

Women radicals at Hunter College were, likewise, disappointed with their rank and file's unwillingness to fully commit to their causes. The most dedicated members of its Young Communist League endeavored to do it all. They traveled long distances back and forth from home, held part-time jobs, distributed party literature, solicited names on petitions, perhaps sold the *Daily Worker* on Manhattan street corners, and attended interminable political meetings on campus, even as veterans of their struggles have averred that they were sure not to miss classes. For notwithstanding their activism, and like so many other students around them, they, too, in the end, sought to earn the credits required for a teaching degree. Most other Hunter students—including many who agreed with the leaders' feelings about changing society—simply neither could, nor would, juggle home, job, social, and educational demands. There were also those at the school who might have taken to the streets but held back because of reasonable fears that if word got out that they were party-affiliated "troublemakers," they might lose their part-time jobs. Looking even further down the road, aspiring teachers understood that if the Board of Education's Board of Examiners designated them as a "potential threat to the school system," they would be denied their coveted pedagogue's license. The many CCNY men in its education department may well have harbored the same strong apprehensions. Conflicted, the majority of Hunter students remained on the sidelines at critical protest moments.[38]

Looking back at his and his comrades' efforts to create ideological strongholds in colleges in the 1930s, socialist Hal Draper, who first spoke out at Brooklyn College and remained with radical movements long enough to link up with New Left operatives in the 1960s, has suggested that during his time at the college, only 1 percent joined the student groups. But their influence, he proudly believed, was transcendent, with "concentric rings of influence embracing different portions of the student body." There were those who would have become more involved had they the time. Others supported particular campaigns when the issues touched home. Perhaps, in this regard, the National Students League and other such leftist organizations found their widest and

staunchest support at CCNY, Hunter, and Brooklyn, in 1932, when they championed the student bodies' ultimate gut issue: their desire to maintain free tuition. As just one sign of the vitality and pervasiveness of this protest, the league was able to turn out some three thousand CCNY night students, arguably the least politically involved cohort on campus, for its 23 May rally. Here activism, in fact, led to city hall's revocation of its tuition plan. Draper has also argued that among those who never showed up at meetings or drives and kept solely to their books and jobs, "even while doing so they could not help absorbing the climate of ideas which pervaded the political life of the campus as a part of the larger society."[39]

Notwithstanding these claims of cultural suzerainty over college life and attitudes, many CCNY students were totally indifferent to the radicals' causes—like those "partisans" ensconced in the sports fan's alcove who "fought over the relative merits of the Dodgers and the Giants" baseball teams. There were also those who actively antagonized the leftists on campus.[40] The most aggressive opponents were those enrolled in the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), a group that, like all organizations at the school, was made up predominantly of Jews who hailed from the very same neighborhoods as the socialists and communists. Explosive contretemps at CCNY between radicals and ROTC men evidenced that New York's Jewish neighborhoods were producing young people who possessed both "revolutionary" and "patriotic" proclivities.[41]

Meanwhile, primarily on the streets of interwar Brooklyn, committed Zionists strove to construct their own ideological strongholds, building on an early heyday of efflorescence that had begun in the late 1910s. Early in the immigrant generation, the Jewish national movement had great difficulties gaining traction. The European assertion that the promises and bounties of the emancipation were ultimately illusions and that the only place where Jews could be free and secure was in their ancient homeland, did not resonate with most downtowners. However, in the early decades of the twentieth century, first under the auspices of the Federation of American Zionists and subsequently within the Zionist Organization of America—and spurred on by the advocacy of the famous jurist Louis D. Brandeis—an attractive new definition of Zionism evolved, tailored for both first- and second-generation American Jews. Often referred to as "Palestinianism," it emphasized American Jews' obligation—as good philanthropists—to assist their European brethren who were building up the settlement in the homeland. No less important, it augured to provide acculturating Jews, who were perhaps estranged from transplanted forms of Judaism, with a new ethnic identity fully in line with the American ideology of cultural pluralism. That teaching stressed that in a heterogeneous society, a good American had to retain a connectedness with his or her group's traditions and future. Studying about Zion and Zionism, attending the movement's rallies, and learning Hebrew were among the most warranted activities.[42]

Palestinianism first crested during World War I, especially when in 1917 the international Jewish movement was the recipient of the Balfour Declaration, the crucial document that would serve as the basis for the British Mandate over Palestine. In the 1920s, with the guarantee of a national home in place, the challenge for the most committed Zionists was to sustain the movement's momentum toward the goal of creating a strong and enduring modern Hebrew culture within second-generation communities.

The best place to imbibe these crucial lessons was within a small string of Jewish day schools that sprung up in several Brooklyn neighborhoods. At the Etz Hayim-Hebrew Institute of Boro Park or the Shulamith School for Girls or the Crown Heights Yeshiva and the Yeshivah of Flatbush, parents could enroll their sons and daughters in modern Jewish educational settings dedicated "to engender[ing] in them a love of their people and its cultural heritage and a strong attachment to the Zionist way of life," even as they upheld modern versions of religious Orthodoxy. For its neighborhood supporters—primarily the parents who paid tuitions—their fondest hopes were that these integrative institutions would become "a training ground for future leaders in Jewish life both in America and Israel." Some of these youngsters would transcend Palestinianism and find their destiny ultimately in the State of Israel. More would be among the best American Zionists. These young people spoke Hebrew and read Hebrew books and magazines, promoted Jewish nationalism as a critical means of group identification in this country, and, of course, were deeply concerned with the fate of the Jewish state.[43]

However, here too most neighborhood youths were neither intrigued nor engaged in this Jewish expression. Certainly, American Zionism in Brooklyn and elsewhere in the city received an additional boost in the 1930s, when the public school system, in a remarkable turnaround from its long history of undermining Jewish identity, accepted Hebrew as a Regents foreign language. Still, as of 1940, the some 3,200 junior high and high school students who opted for this course of study—seven Brooklyn schools offered the subject—and presumably also took part in the Zionistic co-curricular Hebrew Culture Club, constituted less than 5 percent of Jewish enrollment in city schools. And not all of the students who enrolled were Jews.[44]

The consummate reality was that for all the efforts of those engaged in promoting Jewish ideologies on the streets of New York, "very few Jewish youth," a survey in 1940 concluded, "belong to clubs connected with their religion." And the same could be said for affiliation with radical groups. The report continued: "Although the Young People's League of the United Synagogue is reported to have 10,000 members in New York City, the Youth Zionist movement other thousands, and there are smaller groups of Jewish youth organized to promote understanding of Jewish traditions and religion, the total number of members hardly makes an impression on the estimated nearly one-third of a million young

Jews under 25 who live in New York." Perhaps the most salient finding was, seemingly as always, that what these young men and women enjoyed most, is "just hanging around" with their closest friends.[45]

Throughout this era, it seems, the most successful controllers of ideological turf—more successful than the advocates for the all-purpose American synagogue or the radicals or the Zionists—were strictly the Orthodox Jews who maintained enclaves in their parts of Brooklyn. They were a remarkable set of first- and second-generation Jews who had avoided the lures of Americanization and the calls for cultural—if not political—change that had captivated the vast majority of their fellow newcomers and their children. Instead, they maintained a strictly separatist social profile. They surely stood out on the neighborhood scene. In Williamsburg, amid the "dance halls and poolrooms for the young," there lived an aggregation of "really *baale-battishe* [religiously upstanding] Jews and many *talmidei chachomim* [truly learned individuals]." More important, their youngsters tended to follow suit. A comparable pocket of piety could be found in that same Brownsville where most Jews stayed clear of religious life. Minorities of highly observant Jews also called East New York and Bensonhurst their homes.[46]

The focus and pride of their efforts was their yeshivas, most notably the Mesivta Torah Vodaath. It was the most comprehensive of five borough schools for boys and young men that placed the highest premium on the transmission of traditional Torah and Talmud learning, evinced only marginal interest in modern Jewish subjects such as the study of modern Hebrew, and frowned on the teaching of Zionism. These curricular features, as we have previously indicated, were emblematic of those modern nationalist day schools in their own sections of Brooklyn. A similar mission motivated the leaders of the Yeshiva Chaim Berlin, in neighboring Brownsville. It, too, "aspire[d] to reproduce in this country," as one contemporary student of these Brooklyn institutions observed, "the old type of observant God-fearing Jew devoted to the ancient ideals of learning and piety [who would] exhibit the diligence, sincerity and other-worldliness of the traditional *yeshiva bochur*… extreme and uncompromising in its Orthodoxy."

These schools' protocol was to discourage students, as much as possible, from pursuing secular training beyond the high school years that state law required. If their disciples really desired a college degree—to help them earn more money—they were directed to attend Brooklyn College at night. There they would endure fewer challenges to their faith's ideas, and most evening students had no time for secular protests. Nowhere else in this country—not even on the Lower East Side where, until World War I, religious separatism maintained tenuous footholds—were so many young Jews studying more of the Torah and less of the secular world in such a programmed way.[47]

While these religious hubs did well to hold on to many of their youngsters, still they were a limited population. And for all their efforts at isolation, there were young people who drifted or who moved deliberately away from their

parents' worlds. Some became friendly with the also small day school crowd of young men and women; Yeshiva officials wanted them to stay separate from these more modern students. Others pursued college educations by day; but were still quite observant. Finally, other scions of the borough's faithful Jews broke almost completely from traditional religious values. As recounted in one bittersweet family chronicle, a pious Williamsburg family had one son and a daughter who followed in parental footsteps, as "good and upright" second-generation Jews. But a second son reportedly wanted to become a "man of the world." As his still-observant brother would later tell an investigator, after his return from World War I, "he began to mock some of our customs and criticized our rigid observance of the traditional laws.… It was only a question of time until he would go his own way."[48]

While these communities suffered attrition, their numbers soon grew exponentially, and their neighborhoods' commitments to resistance would be reinvigorated and intensified. During and after World War II, Holocaust survivors and refugees from Soviet-dominated eastern Europe who made their way to the United States gravitated to these indigenous Orthodox enclaves. There they would begin their American experiences as Jews who found homes in this country but who endeavored—with a drive that exceeded that of the devout here before them—to live socially and culturally apart from secular environments. There, with their values and perspectives intact, they would strengthen ideological strongholds.

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Notes

[1]Jeffrey S. Gurock, *When Harlem Was Jewish, 1870–1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 164.

[2]Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), especially chs.2 and 5.

[3]This article is part of a book-length treatment of New York Jews from 1920s–2010, to be published in a three-volume history of Jews in the metropolis, *City of Promises* (New York: New York University Press, forthcoming).

[4]William Poster, "'Twas a Dark Night in Brownsville: Pitkin Avenue's Self-Made Generation," *Commentary* (May 1950): 458–464.

[5]Alfred Kazin, *A Walker in the City* (New York: Harcourt, 1951), 11–12, 37–38.

[6]The estimates on Jewish percentages of the population are based on Horowitz and Kaplan's examination of numbers for the so-called "Fordham" section of the Bronx, which constitutes a larger slice of the borough than just the areas surrounding Davidson and Jerome avenues and West Fordham Road, which was Schayes's turf. For both 1930 and 1940 statistics, see C. Morris Horowitz and Lawrence Kaplan, *The Jewish Population of the New York Area, 1900–1975* (New York: Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, 1959), 181.

[7]Phone interview with Dolph Schayes, 5 December 2008.

[8]Ira Rosen, "The Glory That was Charlotte Street," *The New York Times Sunday Magazine* (7 October 1979): 51.

[9]Fred Ferretti, "After 70 Years, South Bronx Street is a Dead End," *The New York Times* (21 October 1977): 51; Beth Wenger, *New York Jews and the Great Depression: Uncertain Promises*

(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 97; Lillian Elkin, "Memoir," American Jewish Committee Oral History Collection, New York Public Library, New York.

[10]On the creation of Orchard Beach, see Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Knopf, 1975), 365–367. On Jews using the beaches, see Wenger, 58.

[11]Stephen Steinberg, *The Academic Melting Pot: Catholics and Jews in American Higher Education* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1974), 20–21; Marcia Graham Synott, *The Half-Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale and Princeton, 1900–1970* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 158, 195.

[12]Heywood Broun and George Britt, *Christians Only: A Study in Prejudice* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1931), 107; Felix Morrow, "Higher Learning on Washington Square," *Menorah Journal* (Autumn, 1930): 353; David Hollinger, "Two NYUs and the 'Obligation of Universities to the Social Order' in the Great Depression," in *The University and the City*, ed. Thomas Bender (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 255. On NYU's Depression-era reversal of policies, see Bender, *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 291.

[13]Hollinger, 256; Morrow, 348; Broun and Britt, 106–107; Bender, 291. See also Synott, 19, and Harold Wechsler, *The Qualified Student: A History of Selective College Admission in America* (New York: John Wiley, 1977), 133.

[14]Morrow, 348–349.

[15]The information on NYU tuition and fees was derived from the school's catalogue for 1923–1924 and 1933–1934, provided by the NYU archive on 15 December 2008. My thanks to Laura Joanne Zeccardi for her assistance. On earning power during the Depression, see Nathan Glazer's memoir comments in Joseph Dorman, *Arguing the World: The New York Intellectuals in Their Own Words* (New York: Free Press, 2000), 43–44. See also Bernard Rosenberg and Ernest Goldstein, eds., *Creators and Disturbers: Reminiscences by Jewish Intellectuals of New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 274 on workers' wages.

[16]A.M. Rosenthal, "Of Course, It Is all Quite Obvious As to Why I Am So Moved," in *City at the Center: A Collection of Writings by CCNY Alumni and Faculty*, ed. Betty Rizzo and Barry Wallenstein (New York: City College of New York, 1983), 67.

[17]Steinberg, 9; L. Shands, "The Cheder on the Hill," *Menorah Journal* (March 1929): 266–267; Thomas Evans Coulton, *A City College in Action: Struggles and Achievement at Brooklyn College, 1930–1955* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), 8, 18.

[18]Shands, 269.

[19]"Subway a 'Campus' for Many at Hunter," *The New York Times* (2 October 1938): 54; Ruth Jacknow Markowitz, *My Daughter the Teacher: Jewish Teachers in the New York City Schools* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 27.

[20]Louis Weiser, "Memoir," American Jewish Committee Oral History Collection, New York Public Library, New York.

[21]For the vision of ideologists setting tones and textures for neighborhoods, see, for example, Moore, 64, and Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1963), 161. See also Jenna Weissman Joselit, *New York's Jewish Jews: The Orthodox Community in the Interwar Years* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 16–17.

[22]Gerald Sorin, *The Nurturing Neighborhood: The Brownsville Boys Club and Jewish Community in Urban America* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 16. Nettie Pauline McGill, "Some Characteristics of Jewish Youth in New York City," *Jewish Social Service Quarterly* 14 (1938): 266–267.

[23]See Gurock, *Judaism's Encounter with American Sports* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 66.

[24]Israel Herbert Levinthal, "The Value of the Center to the Synagogue," *United Synagogue Recorder* (June 1926): 19.

[25]On the rise of synagogue centers in New York during the 1920s, see Moore, 140–143.

[26]Gurock, *Judaism's Encounter*, 70–71; Wenger, 186.

[27]Wenger, 187.

[28]Susan Dworkin, *Miss America, 1945: Bess Myerson's Own Story* (New York: Newmarket Press, 1947), 13–17.

[29]Dworkin, 14–15.

[30]Irving Howe, "A Memoir of the Thirties," in his *Steady Work: Essays in the Politics of Democratic Radicalism, 1953–1966* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), 349–353. See also Gerald Sorin, *Irving Howe: A Life of Passionate Dissent* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 11.

[31]Dorman, 33–34, 36, 39.

[32]Meyer Liben, "CCNY: A Memoir" in *City in the Center*: *A Collection of Writings by CCNY Alumni and Faculty* (New York: City College of New York, 1983), 48; Sorin, *Irving Howe*, 17.

[33]Dorman, 45.

[34]As Wenger has pointed out (214 n. 6), the attitudes and changing perspectives of the "New York Intellectuals" have been favored with much scholarly discussion. See, for example, Terry A. Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals, Partisan Review and Its Circle* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); and Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and their World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[35]Dorman, 46; Liben, 48.

[36]Dorman, 44–45; Liben, 51–52.

[37]Cohen, 24, 27–28, 274–275, 350n. 16; Christopher Phelps, "An Interview with Harry Magdoff—Co-Editor of the 'Monthly Review,'" *Monthly Review* (May 1999), online edition. See also Morris Freedman, "CCNY Days," in *City in the Center*, 65.

[38]Markowitz, 52–54, 60–61.

[39]Hal Draper, "The Student Movement in the Thirties," in *As We Saw the Thirties: Essays on Social and Political Movements of a Decade*, ed. Rita J. Simon (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 182–188. On the tuition crisis, see also, Cohen, 68–71.

[40]James Traub, *City on a Hill: Testing the American Dream at City College* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1995), 39.

[41]"Four Students Seized at Military Drill," *The New York Times* (18 May 1940): 8.

[42]For an overview of the early trials of Zionism in America and the emergence of a distinctive American form, see Naomi W. Cohen, *American Jews and the Zionist Idea* (New York: Ktav, 1975), 1–24 and Melvin I. Urofsky, *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust* (New York: Anchor Press, 1975), 43–152.

[43]Noah Nardi, "A Survey of Jewish Day Schools in America," *Jewish Education* (September 1944): 22–23; Nardi, "The Growth of Jewish Day Schools in America," *Jewish Education* (November 1948): 25.

[44]Judah Lapson, "A Decade of Hebrew in the High Schools of New York," *Jewish Education* (April 1941): 34–45.

[45]McGill and E.N. Matthews, *The Youth of New York City* (New York: Macmillan, 1940), 241, 334.

[46]On strict observance in Williamsburg, see George Kranzler, *Williamsburg: A Jewish Community in Transition* (New York: Feldheim, 1961), 17–18, 214–215.

[47]Meir Kimmel, "The History of Yeshivat Rabbi Chaim Berlin," *Shevilei Ha-Hinnuch* (Fall 1948): 51–54; Alter Landesman, *Brownsville: The Birth, Development and Passing of a Jewish Community in New York* (New York: Bloch, 1969), 234–235; William B. Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva: An Intimate Portrait of Orthodox Jewry* (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 33–34.

[48]Kranzler, 213–215.

American Jewish Leadership Confronts the Holocaust: Revisiting Naomi Cohen's Thesis and the American Jewish Committee

Steven Bayme

Nearly four decades ago I was a student in Naomi Cohen's graduate lecture course on American Jewish history at Columbia University. She had recently completed her history of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), and a student had queried her as to whether she thought she might have been overly charitable about AJC's activities in response to Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. As I recall, she responded that AJC had done all that could have been done given the context and limitations of the period.

In *Not Free to Desist*, Cohen underscores how AJC took Nazism seriously as a challenge and a danger. However, as "children of the Enlightenment," AJC leaders did not fathom fully the radical evil embodied in Nazism. Rather, they utilized traditional models of combating antisemitism—harnessing research to refute Nazi racism, eliciting support from friendly non-Jews, and, above all, opting for private diplomacy while avoiding public demonstrations. Demonstrations, in AJC's view, would serve only to corroborate Hitler's lie of an international Jewish conspiracy. This tradition of "noiselessness," in turn, evoked the support of German Jewish leadership. Although some—both inside and outside AJC ranks—questioned the wisdom of the strategy, few offered concrete ideas for more effective action.

To be sure, Rabbi Stephen Wise and the American Jewish Congress advocated an alternative strategy of boycotting German goods. Cohen minimizes the boycott as "futile."[1] AJC opposed the boycott as a dangerous initiative that might corroborate the view that Nazism was a Jewish problem rather than a problem for western democracies. Moreover, Jewish leadership in Germany opposed the boycott as endangering German Jewry. Finally, AJC feared that the boycott might result in an antisemitic backlash within the United States. In this last regard, AJC opposed the public dimension of the boycott rather than its utilization in principle as a defense instrument.[2]

More generally, AJC tended to exonerate President Roosevelt himself while blaming the State Department as the villain on refugee issues. Moreover, in an America in which isolationist currents prevailed, AJC leaders feared that domestic anti-Nazi protests would spur antisemitism at home. AJC leaders pleaded quietly for more compassionate policies toward German Jewish refugees, yet publicly there was little challenge to America's restrictionist quotas sharply limiting the number of refugees to be admitted. AJC did oppose efforts to limit the quotas even further, but given the prevailing popularity of the quota

system, even—or perhaps especially—in circles considered friendly to Jews, AJC mounted no public challenge to the quota legislation. Again, to have done so not only risked incurring greater antisemitism but also undermined AJC's approach of combating Nazism as a threat to American democracy rather than to the Jews as a people. In effect, AJC worked to contain nativist sentiment in America rather than work to open America's doors to refugees.[3]

AJC's approach by no means epitomized the communal consensus. Zionist leaders favored a more outspoken and public stance. Others advocated a more parochially Jewish stance rather than AJC's penchant for proclaiming antisemitism to be un-American. Still others saw AJC as more concerned with "turning isolationists into anti-Semites than with the plight of European Jewry." Cohen notes how on several occasions AJC did in fact cooperate with Zionist organizations and even entered into public demonstrations, but it did so only apologetically and with considerable ambivalence.[4]

Cohen's portrait strives above all for historical fairness. AJC was hardly a "do nothing" organization in response to Nazism. It undertook a number of initiatives—even at times acting against its impulse to avoid cooperating with Zionist organizations. It perceived President Roosevelt as the primary friend of the Jews and wished to avoid any action that might undermine him or give credence to charges that he was waging a "Jewish war."

Moreover, there were sharp limitations on what AJC could do. Jews had very little political leverage in the American society of the 1930s. Once America had entered into the war, all efforts were directed to attaining victory rather than specifically to rescuing Jews. Given the relatively insecure status of American Jewry in the interwar period, AJC perceived its primary task as one of combating antisemitism domestically rather than abroad.

Cohen acknowledges the limitations of these strategies. For one thing, AJC leaders never understood the uniqueness of Nazism and its "war against the Jews." As a result, the rescue of Jews never attained as great a priority for America as the destruction of Jews did for Hitler. Moreover, she acknowledges that AJC contributed to the divisiveness of American Jewry by failing to create a united front around common strategies. Her conclusion, however, remains that alternative rescue policies were unlikely to have been any more effective than the ones AJC actually pursued.[5]

In Jewish historical memory, Cohen's thesis has fared poorly. Jews today—even Jewish leaders—recall the 1930s as a period of excessive Jewish timidity. Elie Wiesel, for one, has argued that Jews ought to have chained themselves to the White House until such time as Roosevelt was willing to act.[6] Another Jewish leader claims that he became active in the Soviet Jewry movement in the 1960s so that his son would not pose the question he had posed to his own father of why he had been so inactive during the 1930s. Letters appear occasionally in the popular media to the effect that Jews mistakenly trusted Roosevelt and

unwisely avoided criticizing him. One correspondent went so far as to argue that if only Jewish leaders had protested then the way they do today, German Jewry would have been saved!

Nor have Jews treated the memory of FDR particularly favorably. Once revered as Jewry's greatest friend, Roosevelt today is often reviled as the president who failed to rescue. In this historical reconstruction, Jewish leaders placed "excessive trust in princes," engaging in an unrequited love affair with a president who was, at best, indifferent, and at worst cynical about the pleas of the Jews.

Understandably, the decades since the Holocaust have witnessed much soul-searching among Jews. Virtually everyone has his or her own "if only" scenario. "If only" the Jews had been more united, more Zionist, less trusting in Roosevelt, more supportive of rescue schemes, etc., then they believe the dimensions of the Holocaust might have been considerably mitigated. Cohen's research stands as a sharp corrective—reminding Jews that they enjoyed minimal influence and exercised little leverage over the course of public policy in 1930s America.

FDR and Accommodationist Jewish Leadership

Among historians, Cohen's analysis of AJC in the Holocaust years has evoked a more diversified response. Fred Lazin was perhaps the first to criticize Cohen's view that AJC explored all possibilities of relief and rescue, save those that might in turn endanger American Jewry. Lazin argued that AJC simply did not exhaust all potential avenues of rescue—that AJC officers failed to utilize their administration contacts fully and, at times, even discouraged such overtures to administration officials. More generally, Lazin said, AJC consistently proved reluctant to engage in public criticism of Roosevelt and the State Department, arguing that public pressure would by no means enhance the welfare of German Jewry; as a result, AJC opposed the March 1933 Madison Square Garden rally sponsored by the American Jewish Congress together with Christian clergy. Last, Lazin argued, AJC opposed proposals to liberalize immigration quotas into the United States. Lazin concludes that, unfortunately, AJC leaders had failed to prioritize rescue while permitting more personal and professional concerns to take precedence.[7]

Most outspoken, and in many ways most prominent, has been David Wyman, emeritus professor of history and Judaic studies at the University of Massachusetts and founder of the Institute on Holocaust Studies that bears his name. In several books, Wyman has articulated a sharp critique of American policy during the Holocaust years, as well as a more oblique critique of Jewish communal leadership during the period. Wyman finds American policy to have been morally deficient. His first book on the subject, *Paper Walls*, a study of American immigration quota legislation, documents how the doors of America were closed to Jewish entry at the worst possible moment in Jewish history.[8] His subsequent book, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, solidified his reputation as

chief Roosevelt critic, indicting the administration for its failure to rescue in the face of the worst crime in recorded human history.[9]

The core of Wyman's criticism centers around the fourteen-month delay in establishing the War Refugee Board (WRB) as chief instrument of rescue. The news of the Holocaust had been verified by November 1942, yet the WRB was not created until January 1944. Wyman credits the WRB with rescuing 200,000 Jews—chiefly in Hungary—through the heroic actions of individuals such as Raoul Wallenberg. Wyman claims that hundreds of thousands more might have been rescued if not for the unconscionable delay in the creation of the WRB.[10] Moreover, he argues that bombing the death camps was clearly feasible but that American policy makers—chiefly John McCloy—successfully opposed bombing of the death camps as a diversion from the war effort.[11]

In some respects, Wyman in *The Abandonment of the Jews* is far more condemnatory of American policy and critical of American Jewish leadership than he had been in the earlier *Paper Walls*, which remains arguably the leading analysis of American quota legislation limiting immigration into America. Given the popularity of the quota system—passed initially in 1921 and made further restrictive in 1924—Congress likely would have overturned any initiatives to liberalize Jewish immigration. Quotas, in other words, were "essentially what the American people wanted."[12] Neither Roosevelt nor American Jewry was in any real position to overturn them.

In *The Abandonment of the Jews*, however, Wyman takes sharp aim at American bystanders—the Roosevelt administration and, to a lesser but still significant extent, American Jewish leadership. In the face of Roosevelt's indifference and the obstructionism of the State Department, American Jewry failed to mount an adequate campaign for rescue. Rabbi Stephen Wise, for one, was so closely tied to Roosevelt that he had become "unable to be critical of, or even objective about, the President."[13] The Zionists, in Wyman's view, despaired of rescue prematurely, opting in favor of making the case for Jewish statehood after the war. Other Jewish organizations were plagued by institutional rivalries and disunity and therefore were insufficiently committed to rescue and to prioritizing collective Jewish interests above partisan bickering. This was particularly the case with respect to the treatment of the Bergson Boys, the group founded by Peter Bergson (born Hillel Kook), a Palestinian Jew who undertook radical action precisely to penetrate the communications barrier surrounding the Holocaust. Jewish organizational opposition to Bergson went so far as to dissuade Roosevelt from meeting with a delegation of four hundred rabbis who descended on Washington to petition for urgency in addressing the plight of the Jews. Sadly, some Jewish leaders, notably Samuel Rosenman, advisor to the president and longtime AJC member, initially sought to prevent the march of the rabbis and, failing that, urged Roosevelt to ignore it.[14]

In effect, Wyman argues his own "if only" scenarios. If only Jewish organizations had been more united, more forceful in pressing Roosevelt, and more committed to rescue, the WRB would have been established considerably earlier, and many more lives would have been saved. Similarly, if only the news of the Holocaust had been disseminated earlier, fewer Jews would have boarded the trains to Auschwitz. If only Auschwitz would have been bombed by American airplanes, the deportations would have ceased months earlier. Wyman does not by any means impute maliciousness to Jewish leaders. He pointedly exonerates the Zionists from postwar charges of potentially avoiding rescue efforts so as to strengthen the case for Jewish statehood.[15] He does maintain, however, that the disparity between Hitler's commitment to the destruction of the Jews was not at all matched by an equal Jewish or American commitment to their rescue.

Coming two decades after the publication of Arthur Morse's *While Six Million Died*, Wyman's book has become authoritative in the popular mindset. The long-term love affair between Roosevelt and the Jews—initially challenged by Morse—was now set to rest as a figment of the Jewish imagination. Nor could one avoid the innuendo that the Jewish people had been poorly served by a well-intentioned but misguided and ineffective Jewish leadership.[16] Moreover, Wyman's widely heralded volume has inspired numerous offshoots. Within a year of the appearance of *The Abandonment of the Jews*, Rabbi Haskell Lookstein published *Were We Our Brothers' Keeper?*, a study of American Jews' public response to the Holocaust. Lookstein focused in particular on the Jewish media and its relative silence on the Holocaust, coupled with a "business as usual" response among Jewish organizations. Particularly noteworthy, in his view, was the prominence that Jewish organizations allocated to membership drives while only rarely awarding news of the Holocaust high-profile treatment. Reviewing organizational minutes, for example, during Kristallnacht, Lookstein comments acerbically that one could not resist the impression that Jewish leaders "may have been fiddling while German Jews were burning."[17] Similarly, he castigates the policy of silence prevalent among the defense organizations and the tendency of local Jewish communal newspapers to focus on local events rather than international developments. Of course, Jewish newspapers at the time were but fledgling organs with miniscule budgets and limited investigative resources. That local news overshadowed reports of Nazi atrocities only underscores the relatively narrow focus of these small-scale publications.

Last but hardly least, Lookstein repeatedly castigates the short-sightedness—if not blindness—of Jewish communal leaders' love affair with President Roosevelt.[18] In his view, all were guilty: The Zionists, the Orthodox, and the national Jewish organizations.

Lookstein is somewhat more ambivalent on the question of what difference a more outspoken and confrontational posture by Jewish leaders might have achieved. Seemingly he skirts the question of how much leverage American Jewry

actually possessed in influencing American policy. At one point he notes that State Department obstructionism suggests that even "had American Jews done their best… not much in the way of rescue would have been accomplished."[19] Yet in conclusion he argues, like Wyman, that a united Jewish community would have brought about the WRB and "its life saving work many months earlier."[20] Clearly, however, he overstates the importance of the Jewish press and the capacity of American Jews to change the course of American public policy.

Yet Lookstein's fundamental concerns were perhaps more moral than political. He concludes by noting, "The Final Solution may have been unstoppable by American Jewry, but it should have been unbearable. And it wasn't."[21] He cites approvingly Elie Wiesel's severe criticism of Jewish leaders for the absence of hunger strikes, ongoing marches on the White House, and the failure to have "shaken heaven and earth, echoing the agony of their doomed brethren."[22] Whether such 1960s-style protests were even imaginable in the 1930s, much less effective, remain questions critical to understanding Naomi Cohen's earlier analysis.

In more recent years several studies have appeared on the Bergson Boys—the alternative Jewish leadership much praised by Wyman but frequently despised by the Jewish establishment. Perhaps the earliest treatment was a 1980 essay by Sarah Peck depicting the Bergsonites as a group of Palestinian Jews determined to force America into a pro-rescue policy. Although damaged by the same allegations of "fascism" often leveled against the followers of Vladimir Jabotinsky and Revisionist Zionism, as well as charges of financial irregularities (subsequently retracted), Bergson's group, the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, succeeded in attracting an impressive bipartisan roster of supporters for its pro-rescue campaign. Former President Herbert Hoover, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst, former presidential candidate Wendell Willkie, New York Governor Thomas Dewey, Representatives Will Rogers and Guy Gillette, theologians Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, among others, all loaned their names for public use in this campaign.[23]

Jewish leaders, by contrast, charged the Bergson Boys with divisiveness—disrupting the unity of American Jewry in its dire hour of need. According to a State Department memo, Rabbi Stephen Wise went so far as to denounce Bergson "as equally as great an enemy of the Jews as Hitler."[24] If the citation was, in fact, accurate, clearly Wise had overstepped boundaries and had made an odious comparison. Nonetheless, it spoke to the depth of passion among Jewish leaders that Bergson had evoked. At AJC, Executive Director Morris Waldman joined hands with Nahum Goldmann in suggesting that Bergson be deported in order to curtail his activities.[25]

Peck's own conclusions are far more charitable. Citing *The Washington Post*, the *New York Post*, and *The Christian Science Monitor*, she credits the Bergson

Boys with a "large role" in the creation of the WRB.[26] She claims wistfully that had American Jewry united behind Bergson's confrontational approach, the verdict on Jewish rescue activity would have been much better than "too little and too late."[27]

One year later, in 1981, Dr. Monty Penkower of Touro College published another study of the Bergsonites. Penkower traced their origins to a 1942 *Washington Post* story that had summarized the news of the Holocaust in two brief paragraphs. This paucity of treatment in turn inspired Bergson to undertake more dramatic action that would make the Holocaust part of general awareness. Together with Eri Jabotinsky (son of the founder of Revisionist Zionism), historian Ben-Tzion Netanyahu (father of the future prime minister of Israel), columnist Max Lerner, and playwright Ben Hecht, he advocated a program of an international Jewish armed force of 200,000 men to combat Hitler.[28] To accomplish these efforts, the Bergson Boys were determined to create a public relations strategy. Hecht produced a dramatic pageant, "We Will Never Die," indicting America for its silence in the face of Nazi atrocities. The pageant played to impressive crowds in multiple cities. The Jewish establishment, particularly the Zionist leadership, staunchly opposed these efforts. AJC and B'nai B'rith urged that a poem by Hecht, "Ballad of the Doomed Jews of Europe," not be published. The "ballad," to be sure, was particularly inflammatory; it noted that this coming Christmas Christians could enjoy "peace on earth," for there would be fewer Jews alive by then.[29] Moreover, Penkower acknowledges that the Bergson Boys sorely divided American Jewry through their ill-advised efforts to distinguish between the real "Hebrews" and Americans of Jewish descent. Hoping to enable American Jews to support their version of Zionism without undermining their American identity, the Bergson Boys formulated this distinction between Jews and Hebrews suggesting a clear distinction between faith and nation. Most, however, found the distinction artificial at best and divisive at worst.[30] Penkower also notes how Bergson's committee became more militant over time, as the situation became more desperate. For example, when Winston Churchill denounced the Stern gang assassination in 1944 of Lord Moyne as Jewish terrorism, the Bergsonites responded that Britain's refusal to let Jews into Palestine more clearly approximated the actions of the Nazis than did those of the assassins.

Nonetheless, Penkower concludes on a relatively positive note. Like Peck, he credits the Bergonsites with a "major victory" in creation of the WRB and in their ability to "pierce the silence" concerning the Holocaust, bypassing Jewish leadership and the Zionist establishment by appealing to American Jewry generally and Orthodoxy in particular. However, he does criticize their policy of placing excessive trust in the capacity of public opinion to shape public policy and notes, like others, that whatever private criticisms they had of Roosevelt, they avoided any direct confrontation with the president himself.[31]

Since Penkower other historians, closer disciples of Wyman, have gone to great lengths to grant the Bergsonites a prominent place in the pantheon of Jewish rescuers. In pronounced contrast to Stephen Wise's contemporary dismissal of the Bergsonites, Rafael Medoff in particular, together with Wyman, has long advocated granting the Bergsonites recognition as Jewish rescuers. Beginning in 1973, Medoff and Wyman conducted a series of oral history interviews with Bergson in which the latter went to great lengths to charge that the opposition to him and his group fragmented Jewish unity and undermined rescue efforts.[32] He chided in particular Judge Joseph Proskauer and Sam Rosenman of AJC, who, he felt, could have done much more to prod the president but instead provided poor counsel even while posing as representative Jews. Retrospectively, he felt that Proskauer had acted to halt publicity of an admittedly inflammatory ad but had no real alternative rescue proposals.

The most recent and arguably most thorough treatment of the Bergson Boys is by Judith Baumel, *The Bergson "Boys" and the Origins of Contemporary Zionist Militancy*. Baumel traces carefully the efforts by more establishment groups to tar Bergson with financial irregularities and to cast them as Jewish fascists.[33] She argues effectively that Bergson focused primarily on propaganda and public relations rather than ideological considerations with respect to the partisan differences among various Zionist political parties and agendas. In other words, Bergson, in contrast to the established American Jewish leadership, understood the power of the media and was determined to make the Holocaust front page news.[34] In this respect, Stephen Wise's argument that Bergson and his group were a pro-Irgun front was quite irrelevant to their activities. Bergson was seeking to focus public attention on the Holocaust rather than to advance a particular Zionist position.

Establishment opposition to Bergson in turn limited the group's effectiveness and, more damagingly, enabled Roosevelt simply to ignore its protest. Roosevelt, whom Bergson derided as "more than half anti-Semitic," confronted a Jewish community so divided that in effect to heed the counsel of one Jewish group would only earn for him the enmity of numerous others.[35]

Baumel does not shy away from criticizing the group. Like Penkower, she notes that its divisive actions fragmented Jewish unity. Moreover, although the charges of financial irregularities were, in fact, withdrawn, she argues that more than 50 percent of the monies raised were used for securing additional publicity rather than, as the ads implied, direct rescue. The result, Baumel argues, is that the achievements of Bergson's group were, in fact, quite limited.[36]

A more recent indictment of Roosevelt and American Jewry emanates from Robert Beir, a lifelong student of Roosevelt and self-proclaimed admirer. Yet, as he considered the failure to rescue, Beir's doubts about the hero of his youth increased considerably. Part memoir, part history, Beir reconstructs the history of the period as one hardly conducive to protest and rescue.[37] He recalls the domes-

tic antisemitism of the times, spearheaded by highly regarded establishment figures such as Ambassador Joseph Kennedy and Olympics Chairman Avery Brundage.[38] Moreover, few, with the notable exception of Eleanor Roosevelt, took the time to protest the internment of Japanese Americans during the war, suggesting that it was not only animus against Jews that inhibited rescue efforts but rather a more general reluctance to protest governmental policy in the context of the period.[39] Beir does not exempt American Jewry; he faults AJC's lack of urgency surrounding the Holocaust. For example, meetings could not be convened on Sundays because too many members were in the country on weekend holidays.[40] Nor did the Jews in Roosevelt's corner, including AJC stalwart Sam Rosenman, make any effort to energize their boss. Beir echoes Bergson's assessment that Rosenman in fact was the most harmful of Roosevelt's Jews because "he functioned as a Jew"—meaning that because he was considered an active and representative Jew and he was not protesting, that suggested that American Jewry at large was not overly concerned and that whatever protests did occur could be safely disregarded.[41]

Like Lookstein, Beir's concerns are more moral than they are historical. He perceives considerable continuity between the 1930s and the present day with respect to antisemitism and urges that American Jews avoid mistakes of a bygone past.[42]

Laurel Leff extends the criticism of American Jewry to the owners of *The New York Times*. Publisher Arthur Sulzberger, who was sensitive to being the Jewish owner of the country's preeminent newspaper, defined his Jewishness in exclusively religious terms. Ties of peoplehood or special obligations to fellow Jews held no claims on him. Although far more openly Jewish than the famed columnist Walter Lippman, Sulzberger in fact refused to join AJC on the grounds that as an organization it presupposed an ethnic identity of one's Jewishness, and he went so far as to oppose Felix Frankfurter's nomination to the Supreme Court on the grounds that there should be no such thing as a "Jewish seat."[43]

Sulzberger insisted that the *Times* avoid any type of special pleading for Jews. Thus he opposed liberalization of immigration quotas, insisting that there could be only an international solution to the refugee crisis rather than a specifically American one.[44] Most important, Sulzberger advocated Jewish disunity, claiming that a "split is necessary in what is called Jewish opinion in this country."[45] These sensitivities did not mean that the *Times* would not cover the Nazis' war against the Jews. It did connote that the *Times* would rarely go into depth in its coverage of any Jewish issue. The very idea of a Jewish news service such as the JTA offended Sulzberger, and he halted the *Times*'s subscription to it.[46] In effect, Sulzberger, as a high-profile Jew active in several Jewish institutions, contributed to the communications barrier surrounding the Holocaust. Although Leff's book

is not explicitly pro-Bergson, she implies that the times required the militancy of Bergson and his group to penetrate that communications barrier.

Similarly, Gulie Arad faults the timidity of Jewish leaders in failing to confront Roosevelt lest they give credence to Hitler's charges of an international Jewish people. Jews internalized the "liberal fantasy" that good behavior would be rewarded by access to power.[47] Moreover, they underestimated the evil of Nazism, maintaining that it was "manageable."[48] This timidity extended especially to the Jews in Roosevelt's corner—Rosenman, Brandeis, Frankfurter, and speechwriter Ben Cohen—all of whom served as a buffer preventing FDR from even listening to, let alone confronting, more aggressive and outspoken Jewish leaders.[49] Arad argues that greater efforts should have been made to publicize the news of the Final Solution much earlier. However, she concludes that virtually all Jews placed their trust in Roosevelt as the "greatest friend we have" and that, in any case, only relatively few additional numbers of Jews might have been rescued.[50] Nonetheless, she notes that German immigration quotas remained consistently underfilled in the years prior to American entry into the war in December 1941.

Last, Aaron Berman, a historian of American Zionism, embraces the pro-Bergson perspective; he in turn castigates Wise and the Zionists. According to Berman, the latter focused far too much anger at Bergson, particularly over his use of the term "refugees" to refer to Jews fleeing to Palestine—i.e., only people without a homeland may rightly be termed refugees.[51] More generally, in Berman's view, the Zionists failed to understand Hitler's uniqueness, regarding him primarily as just one more in a long line of antisemites. Berman also argues that the Zionists' inability to distinguish between the goals of statehood and rescue meant the politicization of the rescue campaign.[52]

All of these authors are united by their criticisms of Roosevelt's failure to rescue and of the excessive trust placed in Roosevelt by American Jewish leadership. In that sense, they share a common moral imperative that more should have been done, that Roosevelt was guilty of indifference (in pronounced contrast to Eleanor Roosevelt), and that the Jewish people were poorly served by an American Jewish leadership overly enamored of the president. Contrary to Naomi Cohen's relatively favorable portrait of the accomodationist AJC, these authors prefer the more confrontational and outspoken Peter Bergson, who was indeed willing to risk fraying the close relationship between Roosevelt and the Jews. In turn, this school of historians gives voice to Jewish public memory of an unrequited love affair with FDR and a Jewish leadership too timid to challenge the administration.

Contextualizing the History

Yet a second school of historians has constructed a considerably more nuanced view of Roosevelt and American Jewish leadership. Henry Feingold

is perhaps preeminent in this school, eschewing Roosevelt-bashing in favor of contextualizing his failure to rescue. Feingold credits Bergson with breaking the communications barrier concerning the Holocaust and with distinguishing between the goals of rescue and of attaining statehood for Jews. Moreover, he maintains that resettlement schemes might actually have proven successful were they pursued with the same dedication and passion as the Nazi goal of Jewish destruction. The failure to engage in bombing of the railway lines leading to Auschwitz, according to Feingold, was particularly tragic for Hungarian Jewry. At a minimum, such bombing would have exposed the Final Solution to public scrutiny. In his view, bombing at least deserved a trial, even if the result may have been the escalation of German terror.[53] Last, Feingold believes that the Jews in Roosevelt's corner could have been more effective as rescue advocates and bemoans the failure to attempt to influence and energize them to pick up the cudgels of rescue.[54]

Yet Feingold objects to the tendency of many of the earlier authors to read history backward through the lens of Jewish expectations that were normative by the 1980s but singularly inapplicable to the 1930s and 1940s. In particular, he maintains that Jews lacked influence in the 1930s, a decade that constituted perhaps the major period in American history of organized antisemitism. Jewish unity was sadly lacking as well, therefore mitigating the effectiveness of Jewish pressure and protest. In this respect it was not that American Jews were indifferent to the Holocaust; rather, the problem was they lacked adequate leverage to influence the course of events that culminated in the loss of six million.[55]

Similarly, Feingold objects to the tendency to demonize Roosevelt. Roosevelt, to be sure, made political calculations in light of the realities surrounding him—domestic antisemitism and nativism, American isolationism, an obstructionist State Department, and charges that he was maneuvering to have America enter the war because of Jewish influence. Although Feingold does believe that Roosevelt might have done much more, he finds strangely absent from the pro-Bergson historiography efforts to understand Roosevelt's actions or inactions within the context of the era over which Roosevelt presided and which he was laboring so arduously to transform. As a master politician, Roosevelt was motivated far more by political calculations—whether justified or unjustified—than "by indifference and deceit."[56]

Nor is Feingold particularly enamored of the Bergson Boys. Although Bergson succeeded in his communication strategies, he paid the price of aggravating Jewish disunity and strife. Feingold concludes, unlike most, that there may well be no clear pro- or anti-Bergson judgment. In rejecting communal discipline, Bergson attained certain goals but at the expense of fragmenting an already divided Jewish community.[57]

Finally, unlike David Wyman and the pro-Bergson historians, Feingold is not at all certain about the actual possibilities for rescue. He argues that

American Jewry was so marginal a factor that it made at most 5 percent of the difference in addressing the Final Solution. Although rescue opportunities persisted throughout the war, Feingold expresses considerable skepticism as to how successful they might actually have been.[58]

In short, Feingold is by no means easily classifiable. Clearly he diverges from the unequivocal endorsement of Bergson that Wyman, Medoff, and other historians expressed. Conversely, he does believe that more should and could have been accomplished if only America had been so motivated. This argument parts ways with Naomi Cohen's assessment that nothing more could have been achieved in any case. Rather, Feingold eschews clear historical judgment. For him, the task of the historian is to contextualize, exploring the complex set of considerations affecting political decisions. Whether these do or do not justify particular actions or decisions Feingold prefers to leave to the discerning reader.

Similar to Feingold is the more recent work by Theodore Hamerow, *Why We Watched*. Hamerow too invokes domestic considerations as limiting the possibilities of rescue. American Jews feared inciting domestic antisemitism and damaging Roosevelt, whom they regarded as their primary friend and ally. Most important, they feared that an American protest would corroborate the charges that Roosevelt had intervened on behalf of a "Jewish war."[59] Yet Hamerow does take to task a number of Jewish leaders—particularly those in Roosevelt's corner—for excessive timidity. He notes how Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes urged Brandeis to act like an organized minority in pressing the case for rescue as would, for example, the Catholics.[60] He contrasts Sam Rosenman's initiative on universalizing American declarations on war crimes with his non-Jewish colleague John Pehle's willingness to single out Jews as victims. He faults Rabbi Stephen Wise for apologizing for Roosevelt's inaction. He even notes how Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, who became the most Jewishly energized of Roosevelt's brain trust, claimed that the militancy of Orthodox Jews in protest would result in greater domestic antisemitism.[61] More generally, he argues that American Jewry—guided more by emotion than by reason—lacked recommendations for actions that were both practical and sensible.[62]

Yet Hamerow's final assessment about American rescue is actually more benign than Feingold's, to say nothing of the pro-Bergson historians. That the United States admitted 200,000 refugees in the years prior to American entry into the war was, for him, "neither worthless nor shameful."[63] More important, he maintains that Roosevelt's policy of pursuing rescue through quick victory was "essentially correct." Little in fact could have been accomplished through rescue schemes other than diverting America from its goal of complete victory. Contrary to Feingold, he argues that even bombing would have been futile. After all, the Nazi death marches continued well after the liberation of the death camps.[64]

Both Feingold and Hamerow ask what might have been done constructively given the times. Rather than engage in a moralistic assault on the failure to rescue, they offer more nuanced assessments in identifying problems with Jewish leadership. In this sense they should be distinguished both from Wyman and the pro-Bergson historians and from Cohen's defense of AJC.

In Defense of FDR and American Jewish Leadership

Two historians have sought to embrace Stephen Wise as an effective leader of American Jewry during this period. Moshe Gottlieb extols Wise's leadership in promoting the boycott of German goods, a boycott that, in his view, hurt Germany economically and might have actually effected change in German policy had it been more broadly supported.[65] Yet, unfortunately, Wise was undermined by AJC, B'nai B'rith, and the London Board of Deputies, each of whom followed the lead of German Jewry, which opposed the boycott for fear of reprisals.[66] Moreover, the boycott was further undermined by the transfer agreement between the Nazis and the Zionist Organization to transport German Jews to Palestine in exchange for the sale of German goods in the country.[67] Although Wise's differences with AJC appear to have been more tactical than strategic, in Gottlieb's view the absence of unity between leading Jewish organizations thwarted a serious initiative of American Jewry to engage in rescue.

In a full-length biography of Wise, Melvin Urofsky probes these themes further, in effect blaming the "sha-still" approach of AJC and B'nai B'rith as the critical obstacle to Wise's rescue efforts. Wise failed to persuade AJC leadership of the seriousness of the Nazi threat. More generally, AJC opposed any public airing of Jewish issues.[68] Nonetheless, Urofsky concedes that a more unified approach probably would have made little difference in the long run. American Jewry lacked sufficient leverage to alter the course of events in Europe.[69] The critical obstacle, according to Urofsky, was Roosevelt himself. Wise erred in failing to press Roosevelt, whom he regarded as the primary friend of the Jews. Roosevelt's response in any event lacked sufficient moral clarity to elevate rescue into an American priority.[70]

In taking up the cudgels of Wise and AJC, Gottlieb and Urofsky also have parted ways with Naomi Cohen. Cohen argued that AJC had done all that could have been done in the way of rescue. By contrast, Gottlieb and Urofsky maintained that the absence of Jewish unity in support of Wise's initiatives enabled Roosevelt and others to dismiss his efforts.

A further school of historians appears indebted to Cohen's defense of AJC—primarily on the grounds that little else could have been achieved under any circumstances. Unsurprisingly, Marianne Sanua, who was commissioned by AJC to do an institutional history of its second fifty years for its 2006 centennial, opened her volume by acknowledging her indebtedness to Cohen's earlier work. Sanua notes that Breckenridge Long, Roosevelt's refugee officer

frequently accused of antisemitism, was dismissed from his job at least in part because of the pressure exerted by AJC leadership.[71] Sanua acknowledges that AJC absorbed highly unfavorable publicity because of its wartime decision to pull out of the American Jewish Conference after the latter's acceptance of Palestinian statehood as a goal. To this day, in fact, AJC occasionally receives criticism of that decision. Sanua, however, contextualizes it by pointing to Judge Proskauer's reversal of AJC's decision in 1948 and endorsement of Jewish statehood, a move that effectively pulled the rug out from under the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism.[72]

Yet the most important member of this group of historians is Lucy Dawidowicz, whose widely acclaimed volume, *The War Against the Jews*, became the standard history of the Holocaust for American readers. In an essay on rescue activity written some years subsequently, Dawidowicz argued that only American military power could have averted the Holocaust. She doubts whether bombing the camps would have been successful and notes that had bombing occurred, the most likely result would have been Hitler's speeding up the destruction process.[73] In turn, Dawidowicz credits Roosevelt with marginalizing American isolationists by tarring them with the brush of antisemitism. By withdrawing after Kristallnacht the American ambassador to Germany, Roosevelt initiated a process designed to transform America from isolationism to interventionism and signaled the bankruptcy of Munich and the policies of appeasement toward Germany.[74]

Nor does Dawidowicz place much stock in the pro-Bergson historians. To be sure, she credits Bergson with raising American consciousness with the fate of the Jews. Nonetheless, she pithily answers Bergson's query (in later years, articulated by Elie Wiesel), "What would have happened if [American Jews] had stormed the White House?" by stating that such activity would have only "brought out the army."[75]

The critical lesson for American Jewry, according to Dawidowicz, lies in the consequences of powerlessness. American Jewry lacked the leverage to alter the course of U.S. policy.[76] The indictments of Jewish leadership articulated by pro-Bergson historians failed to contextualize and ascribed to American Jews influence that they in fact lacked. The lesson for Jews today is perhaps less "never again" so much as "never again should the Jews be so powerless."[77]

Sanua and Dawidowicz, as noted, follow Cohen's footsteps in declaring Jewish leadership innocent of the crime of "business as usual" or indifference to the fate of European Jewry. The British historian, Tony Kushner, expands on Cohen's claim that Jewish leadership simply could not fathom the radical evil of Nazism. For Kushner, the "liberal imagination"—a mindset inviting comparison with Cohen's description of AJC leaders as "children of the Enlightenment"—weakened the response to the Holocaust because of its refusal to consider the Jews as a collective entity. The liberal imagination connoted

that Jews be taken strictly as individuals. For Kushner, this meant a failure to recognize that rescue during the Holocaust mandated that liberal assimilationism needed to give way to cultural pluralism.[78]

To be sure, differences exist between Kushner and Cohen. Kushner credits the War Refugee Board with rescue of 100,000 Jewish lives and ascribes its creation to Jewish assertiveness. He longs for a more forceful stance on the part of British Jewry, clearly believing that many more lives might have been saved, had there only been a more vocal advocate for rescue.[79] Yet he shares Cohen's view of Jewish leadership as liberal children of the Enlightenment. For Cohen, that meant a failure to confront the reality of a Final Solution and the evil of Nazism. Kushner amends this to mean also an inability to define Jews as a collective entity requiring rescue measures that targeted them specifically as a people.

The most sweeping and unqualified defense of Roosevelt, coupled with a dismissal of the claims of pro-Bergson historians, is Robert Rosen in his work, *Saving the Jews*. Rosen notes how Roosevelt's New Deal opened up America to Jewish participation, commenting that the Jews formed 15 percent of Roosevelt's high-level appointees.[80] More important, Rosen credits Roosevelt with maneuvering America into a military confrontation with Nazi Germany. Roosevelt bucked the tides of isolationism in sending planes to England even against the advice of so revered a figure as George Marshall.[81] By the fall of 1939, America was already engaged in an undeclared shooting war with Nazi Germany. After Pearl Harbor, it was Germany rather than Japan that became America's major military theater—a fact that, as late as 1943, former U.S. Ambassador to France William Bulliet ascribed to "Jewish influence."[82]

Similarly, Rosen dismisses the claims of Bergson's defenders. He cites even a Bergson supporter such as Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver's reference to the Bergson Boys as "charlatans and racketeers."[83] In turn, he defends Roosevelt's decision to decline to meet with a group of four hundred Orthodox rabbis because more established American Jewish leaders had described the rabbis as "un-American," and therefore not at all representative of American Jewry, let alone its more educated classes.[84]

Last, Rosen exonerates Roosevelt on the question of bombing and on the 1939 affair of the *St. Louis*. He repeats the well-rehearsed arguments that precision bombing was impossible[85] but goes further, arguing that the sole evidence that Roosevelt even knew about the bombing request came only as late as 1986, when then-ninety-one-year-old John J. McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War during World War II, who until that point had denied that the request had ever reached Roosevelt's desk, reported that Roosevelt had rejected bombing as fruitless.[86] As for the *St. Louis*, Rosen argues that only an act of Congress—not a presidential directive—could have aided the ill-fated refugee ship.[87]

Rosen's argument frequently resembles a lawyer's brief. He ignores the fact that the German immigration quotas remained consistently underfilled right up through 1941. Moreover, Roosevelt unfortunately kept Breckenridge Long in charge of the refugee desk for far too long. As for the *St. Louis*, Roosevelt failed to undertake a public campaign for admitting the nine hundred passengers aboard the ship and to overcome bureaucratic regulations in the face of humanitarian rescue needs. In effect, Rosen replaces the predominant pattern of Roosevelt-bashing with a one-sided defense of Roosevelt's leadership.

Yet the most controversial defense of Roosevelt and American Jewry comes from the pen of yet another British historian, William Rubinstein. In a work dedicated to the memory of Lucy Dawidowicz, Rubinstein argues that rescue was impossible and that the various rescue proposals, had they been implemented, would have meant only a "minor difference."[88] More specifically, he chides David Wyman for simultaneously conceding the unlikelihood of rescue proposals yet insisting they should have been tried in any case.[89] Moreover, he notes that no Jewish group, including AJC, recommended bombing Auschwitz in the months leading up to the Hungarian deportations.[90] Most important, however, Rubinstein argues that rescue was impossible because Jews were prisoners, not refugees, in Nazi-occupied Europe. Hitler's determination to eliminate the Jews constituted the primary obstacle to rescue—not indifference on the part of would-be rescuers. Only the Nazis were guilty—not the bystanders. Jewish disunity was quite real in the 1930s but ultimately irrelevant to the cause of rescue.[91]

Rubinstein's work, standing in pronounced contrast to the indictments of Roosevelt and American Jewry others articulated, understates rescue possibilities. To be sure, Hitler himself probably was quite unmovable on the question of Jews. International protests, however, might have given others within the Nazi hierarchy reason for pause and thereby might have served as a brake on the Final Solution. In other words, international protest may have strengthened the hands of individuals—on both elite and grassroots levels—to resist Hitler's demands for the elimination of Jews. Rubinstein does address contemporary implications. He compares the pro-rescue movement to the Soviet Jewry movement of the 1970s—a protest movement that, he argues, possessed few achievements prior to Gorbachev's glasnost in the 1980s.[92] However, to press the analogy with the Soviet Jewry movement, it may be argued that American Jewry's assertive stance served both to keep the cause of Soviet Jewry alive until glasnost and signaled to Soviet Jews that there was international Jewish solidarity with their plight. The Jackson Amendment tying trade policy to freedom of emigration signaled both solidarity with Soviet Jews and the willingness of American Jewry to attempt to influence American foreign policy on behalf of Soviet Jews. Moral victories such as these remain part of the historical record.

Historiographical Conclusions

What then may we conclude from this review of the historical literature? What may be said about America's actions and inactions and of American Jewry's love affair with Roosevelt? How do we assess American Jewry and its leadership during the period? Last, how has Naomi Cohen's analysis of the American Jewish Committee stood the test of time across four decades? First, American failure to rescue needs to be ascribed to a multiplicity of factors, rather than to a single cause. In this sense, Henry Feingold is correct to underscore the political context in which rescue was considered. As key State Department officer with responsibility for refugee matters, Breckenridge Long clearly posed a major hurdle for rescue advocates. To this must be added, however, the overwhelmingly popular appeal of restrictionist quotas for immigrants, to which the U.S. Congress was sensitive. Even as strong a critic of administration policy as David Wyman noted that overturning quota legislation meant flying in the face of overwhelming public opinion that was clearly reflected by U.S. congressmen and senators. Nor was intellectual opinion outspoken on behalf of rescue. Deborah Lipstadt has demonstrated that aside from small-circulation periodicals such as *The New Republic* and *The Nation*, few organs of public opinion placed any emphasis on the news of the Holocaust.[93] Add to this the divisions within American Jewry and the perceptions of Nazi intransigence as so great that little might have been achieved in any case, and one begins to understand why rescue initiatives failed to garner adequate support to provide a counterweight to the Final Solution.

Yet one must ask whether a policy that was more committed to rescue would have made any difference. Here a distinction needs to be drawn between the prewar period and the war period. Karl Schleuness has described Nazi policies and programs as constituting a "twisted road to Auschwitz."[94] Prior to 1939 the Nazis were quite sensitive to world opinion and might very well have moderated their policies in response to western protests. As mentioned earlier, German immigration quotas to the United States remained consistently underfilled even as late as 1941. Yet, as the *St. Louis* affair demonstrated, the possibilities of rescue were there, but, because of complex interlocking factors, the willingness to elevate rescue into a national priority was not.

After American entry into the war, however, rescue possibilities became fewer. William Rubinstein perhaps is far too categorical in dismissing rescue possibilities, but, as he does note, European Jews were largely prisoners in Nazi-occupied Europe rather than refugees. Heroic narratives of key rescuers such as Raoul Wallenberg constitute shining moral examples of the potential of human altruism. Sadly, however, these stories pale in the larger context of Hitler's war against the Jews. Moreover, so long as the war's outcome remained in doubt, rescue activity necessarily was relegated to a subsidiary position within Allied considerations. David Wyman faults the U.S. government for failing to create

a War Refugee Board as early as November 1942, when the news of a Final Solution became verified. Morally, his position is correct. However, he fails to ascribe adequate weight to the wartime context in which the board came into existence only once Allied victory had become a virtual certainty.

What about Roosevelt himself? Clearly he was oversensitive to the charge of "Jew Deal" and therefore less willing to undertake a public education effort on behalf of rescue. Eleanor Roosevelt's efforts in this regard stand in pronounced contrast to those of her husband. Moreover, Roosevelt's duplicity regarding Palestine—telling Jewish and Arab advocates mostly what they wished to hear about a postwar settlement of the Palestine problem, even if what he told them was mutually contradictory—has failed to attract nearly as much attention in the historical literature as his failure to bomb the death camps.[95] For these reasons, the relationship between Roosevelt and the Jews merits historical revision. The love affair seen in retrospect was simply far too one-sided.

Yet the alternative model of "Roosevelt-bashing" serves only to replace one simplistic position with another. Specifically, this latter position fails to acknowledge what Roosevelt actually achieved and why he indeed merits favorable assessments from Jews to this day. First, the New Deal did open America to Jewish participation. In this sense, Roosevelt initiated a process that continues to this day of Jews serving in high governmental positions beyond all proportion to their numbers within American society. The ethos of inclusivity embodied in the New Deal, which enabled Jews to be recognized on the basis of their merits and achievements, meant in effect that no society in Diaspora Jewish history would prove as welcoming of Jewish participation as has the United States. To be sure, including Jews in American society does not equate morally with rescue of Jewish lives. However, the New Deal clearly did alter the course and trajectory of American Jewish history in highly positive ways.

Second, what cannot be overlooked but is all too often lost in Jewish historical memory is Roosevelt's success in transforming the American mindset from isolationism to internationalism. Beginning with Munich and Kristallnacht, Roosevelt moved to marginalize the isolationists—including those such as Senators Borah and Johnson, who were otherwise central to his New Deal coalition—and prepared America for intervention into World War II. Like Winston Churchill, Roosevelt recognized that the democracies could not coexist with the evils of Nazism. Even after Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt acted on a "Europe first" policy at a time when most Americans focused their most intense anger at the Japanese. Roosevelt's actions in rearming America, securing Lend-Lease for Britain, and even engaging in an undeclared shooting war with German submarines in the fall of 1939 constituted an enormous reversal of prevailing American currents of neutralism and isolationism. He demonstrated leadership not by following the polls but by shaping and transforming public opinion. In this context, one can view Roosevelt's policy of "rescue through victory" more

charitably, even if one wishes that alternate rescue proposals had merited more serious consideration.

Moreover, to accomplish this transformation of America, Roosevelt paid a heavy price in the enemies he made. Charles Lindbergh, an American hero and icon, warned that American Jews were a critical force pushing the United States into an unnecessary war. Ambassador Joseph Kennedy believed that Britain was virtually defeated but that America had no reason for armed conflict with Hitler, although he recognized that the Jews surely did have such a reason. Roosevelt's political opponents, who enjoyed great esteem within American public opinion, argued that he in effect was being manipulated by Jewish advisors and leaders eager for a military confrontation with Nazi Germany. Progressive Senator Hiram Johnson gave voice to these sentiments in a letter to his son:

> Jews on one side, wildly enthusiastic for the President, and willing to fight to the last American.… I hate the persecutions to which the Jews have been put, and I will go to any fair lengths, save the ruin of my country to aid them, but I will not go to the length of fighting citizens of other nations…. [FDR] will do anything for applause and it is this very group at present which applaud him to the echo.

Little wonder that Roosevelt would soft-pedal rescue activity during the pre-Pearl-Harbor days, lest he give credence to charges that would undermine his larger strategy to secure American interventionism.[96]

What about American Jewry and its leadership? American Jewry in the 1930s remained quite unsure of itself. It was a relatively new community that feared for its own political and economic security in what remained a depressed American economy in a society that had proved hospitable to a wide range of antisemitic groupings. The notorious Father Coughlin each Sunday broadcast over the radio and blamed American social ills on the evil machinations of a Jewish conspiracy. Moreover, American Jews remained keenly sensitive about the popularity of pro-restriction sentiment. Even after the Kristallnacht pogrom of November 1938, when Roosevelt recalled the U.S. Ambassador to Germany for consultations and sympathy with the Jewish plight had increased greatly, the polls reported further increases in opposition to more liberalized immigration policies.

Last, as noted, American Jewry of the 1930s was a fragmented community at odds with itself. The absence of a united front weakened Jewish presence and made it easier to ignore Jewish representations. Satisfying one set of requests by Jewish leaders only guaranteed evoking the wrath of still others. The Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, which was created in the postwar period, to some extent represented an attempt to learn from the mistakes of the past by presenting a united front in support of Israel before the circles of power in 1950s Washington.

Yet criticism of American Jewish leadership generally fails to ask how much leverage American Jewry actually enjoyed, even had the community been more united. Sadly, as noted above, the answer was very little. It remains doubtful that an American society already severely weakened by the Depression and concerned about the looming storm clouds in Europe and Asia would in fact have been receptive to increased Jewish protest. More likely, a more confrontational approach would have evoked charges of Jewish particularism and selfishness at a time when Americans faced far greater challenges. For example, the Bonus Army in 1932 consisted of American veterans of World War I who demanded that their promised bonus checks be awarded to them sooner than intended, given their current economic needs. Members of the Bonus Army pitched their tents in Washington only to find themselves rudely evicted by General Douglas MacArthur.[97] If such was the treatment accorded American veterans of war asking only that they receive what was due them earlier than promised, one can hardly imagine more receptive treatment to Jews chaining themselves to the White House on behalf of co-religionists abroad. Nor did the State Department in the 1930s exert itself on behalf of American citizens residing in the Soviet Union, who had in effect become prisoners of Stalinist tyranny.[98] In short, the mindset of 1930s Washington was distinctly unreceptive to requests for interventions on behalf of special interest groups, whether domestic or abroad.

And finally, how does Naomi Cohen's analysis of AJC read today? Contemporary AJC leaders generally perceive themselves as presiding over an agency much transformed from the AJC of the 1930s and 1940s. Retrospectively, Jewish leadership at the time is often seen as "not ready for primetime," fearing the specter of domestic antisemitism rather than rising to the challenges of global responsibilities. In this context, some aspects of Cohen's analysis need to be underscored as particularly compelling: First, as noted, she provided an appropriate corrective to "Roosevelt bashing." Second, she correctly perceived AJC leadership of the 1930s as "children of the Enlightenment" who failed to fathom the evil reality of Nazism and placed excessive trust in education and social scientific research as antidotes to antisemitism. Last, she appropriately reminded us that American Jewry in the 1930s lacked sufficient leverage and power during these darkest moments of Jewish history.

To be sure, contemporary AJC leaders generally acknowledge that alternate rescue avenues should have been explored. For example, as noted earlier, Henry Feingold argued that more should have been done in efforts to energize the secular Jews in Roosevelt's corner—theoretically a constituency within AJC's reach.[99] Even Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr., whose intervention with Roosevelt resulted in the creation of the War Refugee Board, came under greater pressure from his Jewish secretary than he did from Jewish leaders or from Roosevelt's Jewish advisors. As Morgenthau's son reminisced

in subsequent decades, the Jews in Roosevelt's corner "avoided or downplayed the significance of Jewish questions." They had no wish to stand out as active Jews.[100]

Perhaps more tellingly, AJC leadership failed to join a united Jewish front on behalf of statehood in 1943—an error subsequently rectified by Judge Proskauer's decision in 1948 not to oppose a Jewish state because its creation represented the collective will of the Jewish people. Proskauer's decision effectively spelled the death knell of the American Council for Judaism.[101] Put more broadly, AJC today prides itself on its unswerving support for Israel, meeting its global responsibilities, and representing the collective interests and welfare of the Jewish people.

In its core components, however, Naomi Cohen's writing has withstood much, if not all, of the test of time. She identified correctly the context in which Jewish leadership operated, the limitations upon Jewish political activity, and the limitations of AJC leaders in their own vision and understanding. For a Jewish community that often leaps too quickly to judgments, Naomi Cohen reminds us that the fair-minded historian first must reconstruct the context of the times and draw a comprehensive portrait before historical judgments may be reached.

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Notes

[1]Naomi Cohen, *Not Free to Desist* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1972), 162.

[2]Ibid., 163–166.

[3]Ibid., 170–173, 185–186.

[4]Ibid., 240–242.

[5]Ibid., 259.

[6]Melvin Urofsky, *A Voice That Spoke For Justice* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1982), 319–320.

[7]Frederick Lazin, "The Response of the American Jewish Committee to the Crisis of German Jewry, 1933–1939," *American Jewish History* 68, no. 3 (March 1979): 283–304, esp. 284–285, 289–291, 296–298, and 304.

[8]David Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis, 1938–1941* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1968), passim.

[9]David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), passim.

[10]Ibid., 331.

[11]Ibid., 295–297.

[12]Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 213. See also, loc. cit, 141, 209–212.

[13]Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, 69.

[14]Ibid., 152–153.

[15]Ibid., 177.

[16]Ibid., 328–329. See also Arthur Morse, *While Six Million Died* (New York: Random House, 1967), passim.

[17]Haskell Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers' Keeper?* (New York: Hawthorne House, 1985), 58.

[18]Ibid., 33, 211.

[19]Ibid., 138.

[20]Ibid., 183.

[21]Ibid., 216.

[22]Ibid., 211.

[23]Sarah Peck, "The Campaign for an American Response to the Nazi Holocaust," *Journal of Contemporary History* 15 (1980): 367–398, esp. 377, 385 for non-Jewish support.

[24]Ibid., 393.

[25]Ibid., 380–381.

[26]Ibid., 387.

[27]Ibid., 393.

[28]Monty Penkower, "In Dramatic Dissent: The Bergson Boys," *American Jewish History* 70, no. 3 (March 1981): 281–383.

[29]Ibid., 289.

[30]On the attempted distinction between Jews and Hebrews see Judith Baumel, *The Bergson "Boys" and the Origins of Contemporary Zionist Militancy* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 202–205.

[31]Penkower, op. cit., 306–309.

[32]David Wyman and Rafael Medoff, *A Race Against Death* (New York: The New Press, 2002), passim, esp. 65–69, 136–137.

[33]Baumel, 74–75.

[34]Ibid., 139–140.

[35]Ibid., 145.

[36]Ibid., 257.

[37]Robert Beir, *Roosevelt and The Holocaust* (Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, 2006), 19–21.

[38]Ibid., 26–27, 95–97.

[39]Ibid., 25–27.

[40]Ibid., 140.

[41]Ibid., 231–232.

[42]Ibid., 274–277.

[43]Laurel Leff, *Buried by the Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 23–27. On Lippman and his insensitivity to the Holocaust, see Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippman and the American Century* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1980), 330–333.

[44]Leff, 34.

[45]Ibid., 203.

[46]Ibid., 46–47.

[47]Gulie Arad, *America, Its Jews, and the Rise of Nazism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 93.

[48]Ibid., 123.

[49]Ibid., 138.

[50]Ibid., 202.

[51]Aaron Berman, *Nazism, the Jews, and American Zionism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 121–122.

[52]Ibid., 183.

[53]Henry Feingold, *Bearing Witness: How America and its Jews Responded to the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 150–151, 266.

[54]Ibid., 236.

[55]Ibid., 270–271.

[56]Ibid., 194.

[57]Ibid., 195.

[58]Ibid., 257.

[59]Theodore Hamerow, *Why We Watched* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2008), 321.

[60]Ibid., 244.

[61]Ibid., 344–348.

[62]Ibid., 334–343.

[63]Ibid., 255.

[64]Ibid., 382, 399, 418.

[65]Moshe Gottlieb, *American Anti-Nazi Resistance 1933–1941* (New York: Ktav, 1982), 345.

[66]Ibid., 36–37, 51.

[67]Ibid., 96.

[68]Urofsky, 301.

[69]Ibid., 322–323, 330.

[70]Ibid., 324–325, 321.

[71]Marianne Sanua, *Let Us Prove Strong* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2007), 16.

[72]Ibid., 23–24. On the American Council for Judaism, see Thomas Kolsky, *Jews Against Zionism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 103–104, 146–147.

[73]Lucy Dawidowicz, *What is The Use of Jewish History?* (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), 171–173.

[74]Ibid., 164–165. On the recall of Ambassador Hugh Wilson, see also Sander Diamond, "The Kristallnacht and the Reaction in America," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 14 (1969): 204–208.

[75]Dawidowicz, 195.

[76]Ibid., 174.

[77]Ibid., 177.

[78]Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and The Liberal Imagination* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 32–37, 59–60, 132.

[79]Ibid., 189–199.

[80]Robert Rosen, *Saving The Jews* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006), 4.

[81]Ibid., 139.

[82]Ibid., 232.

[83]Ibid., 318.

[84]Ibid., 329–331.

[85]Ibid., 469.

[86]Ibid., 405–406.

[87]Ibid., 447.

[88]William D. Rubinstein, *The Myth of Rescue* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 113.

[89]Ibid., 4.

[90]Ibid., 114, 163.

[91]Ibid., 116–119.

[92]Ibid., 121.

[93]Deborah Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 31 and passim.

[94]Karl Schleuness, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1970), passim.

[95]Peter Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1983), 150–157.

[96]Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 308. See also 444–445 and passim.

[97]Paul Dickson and Thomas B. Allen, *The Bonus Army* (New York: Walker and Co., 2004), 170–180.

[98]Tim Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008), 64.

[99]Feingold, *Bearing Witness*, 241–242.

[100]Henry Morgenthau III, *Mostly Morgenthaus* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1991), 322–323.

[101]Sanua, 56–58, 91. On Proskauer's reasoning, even as early as 1942, see Menahem Kaufman, *An Ambiguous Partnership* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 99–100.

Herbert Alpert, *Louis Marshall, 1856–1929: A Life Devoted to Justice and Judaism* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, Inc., 2008), 226 pp.

The life of Louis Marshall is an extraordinary subject for a biography. From 1904 to 1929, he was the foremost champion of Jews' civil rights in America and abroad. He fought at the barricades of some of the great civil rights battles of his era and made presidents and foreign powers listen to the cause of the oppressed. No one before or since Marshall has occupied so dominant a position in American Jewish communal life.

Remarkably, in spite of Marshall's profound influence, no scholarly biography of him exists. Brief sketches of his life abound, and rarely a year goes by without a new book or article touching on discrete facets of his career. But a comprehensive treatment of his life and works has yet to be attempted, let alone completed.

Louis Marshall, 1856–1929: A Life Devoted to Justice and Judaism does not presume to fill the void. The author, Herbert Alpert, is not a professional historian. An unabashed admirer of Marshall, he has spent years researching his subject. That labor of love has produced a charming book that traces Marshall's Horatio Alger rise from humble beginnings in Syracuse, New York, to national and international renown. In the process, the author reviews some of Marshall's most impressive achievements, including his leadership in persuading the United States to abrogate the Russian-American Treaty on Trade and Navigation of 1832; his valiant (albeit unsuccessful) defense of Leo Frank in the U.S. Supreme Court; his fight during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 to guarantee the civil and political rights of racial, religious, and linguistic minorities; and his role in extracting a public apology from celebrated industrialist Henry Ford, who perpetrated one of the most serious antisemitic episodes in American history.

To be sure, readers seeking new information about Marshall's career may be disappointed. Much of the book goes over well-traveled ground. The one gap in the literature it admirably fills, though, is Marshall's personal life. Little was previously known of his relationship with his wife and three children, but thanks to Alpert that is no longer the case. From the American Jewish Archives' Marshall Collection, Alpert has unearthed private correspondence that sheds new light on Marshall's interior life. Indeed, the letters between Marshall and his wife reveal a tenderness and sentimentality that come as something of a revelation, especially given accounts by some of Marshall's contemporaries about his toughness and arrogance.

For all its imperfections, Alpert has produced what stands as the only full-length biography of Marshall in print, and for that he is to be commended.

Henry M. Greenberg is a trustee of the Historical Society of the Courts of the State of New York. He is the author of "Louis Marshall: Attorney General of the Jewish People," a chapter published in Noble Purposes: Nine Champions of the Rule of Law.

Baruch J. Cohon, ed., *Faithfully Yours: Selected Rabbinical Correspondence of Rabbi Samuel S. Cohon During the Years 1917–1957* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2008), 407 pp.

This edited volume of Rabbi Samuel S. Cohon's letters is a fascinating look at his understanding of not only Reform Judaism, but Conservative and Orthodox as well. Here Rabbi Cohon's son, Rabbi Baruch Cohon, presents inquiries and replies, sometimes even dialogues, about topics such as interfaith relations, religious observance, and the synagogue. He also intersperses commentaries on how his father's statements relate to the Reform Judaism of today. Some of these inquiries were addressed directly to Rabbi Cohon, some were forwarded from colleagues, and some were sent by readers of magazines for which Cohon wrote. These questions, posed by lay people and religious leaders (both Jewish and Christian) between 1917 and 1957, are in most cases similar to questions asked today. Cohon addresses issues of intermarriage, death, Zionism, religious observance, the rabbinate, the Reform movement, and antisemitism with grace and knowledge, and he presents his information in such a way that it reaches the needs of the inquirer, whether that person be a congregation president; Jewish religious leaders such as Rabbi David Max Eichhorn (a leader of the chaplaincy for the U.S. military) or Rabbi Solomon Freehof (a president of the CCAR and chair of its Liturgy Committee for a number of years); or members of the Christian clergy. Readers will find Cohon's statements not only interesting in historical context but helpful because we still deal with these same issues.

The section on antisemitism is most interesting, not just because many of these same problems still exist, but because Cohon explains how the antisemitic statements can be debunked using the Jewish texts from which the statements have been taken out of context. It is also interesting to see which standards Cohon keeps over the course of the forty years of this book and which ones he is willing to adapt to common practice. For example, he responds to a number of synagogue leaders about the question of moving the Sabbath to Sunday. On this he never waivers: Sabbath is on Saturday, the last day of the week. However, on the question of reading the Torah on Friday night rather than on Saturday morning, he slowly accepts the practice that many synagogues had adopted because he came to realize that if people are going to attend services it is more likely to be on Friday evenings than Saturday mornings. The reader can follow his subtle changes in arguments on this subject over time.

The appendix is not to be overlooked. In this final section, we only see the letters from a young woman in Kentucky who is trying to find herself as she discovers the religion of Judaism that her mother never practiced upon moving to rural Kentucky with her Baptist husband. Unfortunately, Rabbi Cohon's letters to this woman are lost, but her vivid responses show the gentleness and forthrightness with which Rabbi Cohon wrote. Overall, this book is a very insightful and creative way to learn about the theology and expansive knowledge of Rabbi Samuel S. Cohon.

Mara Cohen Ioannides, faculty member in the English Department at Missouri State University, has published numerous articles on the history of haggadot and Ozarks Jewry. She has written and codirected a documentary on Ozarks Jewry and published an award-winning novel about the Jews of Greece.

Aviva Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America: A Diasporic History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 321 pp.

Aviva Ben-Ur's *Sephardic Jews in America: A Diasporic History* is a landmark contribution to the history of those Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews who were all too often invisible to the "mainstream" Jewish community and to the historiography of American Judaism. Any review of the standard histories of Jews in the modern world—whether popular or academic—shows an astounding elision of the presence of non-Ashkenazi Jewry within the larger narrative of modern Jewish history.[1] At best, the Jews of the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, the Middle East, and Persia are treated as exotic and underdeveloped "outposts" on the margins of the "real" modern Jewish story. Ben-Ur is well aware of this historiographic erasure and sees her history as an essential corrective—giving voice to the Sephardic Jewish experience in America and challenging the classical narratives of American Jewish history.

Ben-Ur's extensive investigation into the panoply of mostly Ladino language sources (newspapers, pamphlets, and letters) and far-reaching interviews with Sephardic immigrants allow her to construct this history with depth and nuance. The book does not set out to tell a linear narrative; rather, it focuses on select sociocultural relationships as they developed between the Sephardic and Mizrahi immigrants at the center of her study, as well as those relationships among other groups: the older and well-established western Sephardic community of New York's Shearith Israel Congregation, the central and eastern European Jews who made up the overwhelming majority of Jewish immigrants to the United States, and different groups of non-Jewish Hispanics in New York. While her main focus is on the Ladino-speaking immigrants who came to the United States from the former Ottoman Empire during the first three decades of the previous century, Ben-Ur also includes nuanced discussions of the experiences of other non-Ashkenazi immigrants, such as the Romaniot, Syrian, and Yemenite communities.

After a solid introduction to the parameters and basic history of her main subject, Ben-Ur presents the complex history of the Ashkenazi adoption of the Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew in Israel and the West as a test case for considering the possible impact of Sephardim on the culturally hegemonic and numerically superior Ashkenazim. She concludes that, in actuality, Sephardim had almost no influence on this linguistic shift. Ben-Ur seizes upon this absence of influence to argue beyond the historiographic model of "impact and influence" as the guiding light of Jewish historical inquiry. Focusing on the impact of Jews on American culture, Ben-Ur argues, is more about apologetics than actually understanding the lives of American Jews. Looking at the "dynamics of exclusion" may offer a more appropriate historiographic model not only for the "minority within a minority" experience of non-Ashkenazi Jews but also to understanding the broader American Jewish experience. This argument is in line with her focus on the sociocultural periphery as an ideal way to appreciate the center. This chapter is, at times, somewhat disconnected from the rest of the book; however, the themes it explores—language, identity, modernity, and authenticity—inform everything that follows.

The analysis of eastern Sephardic interactions with their thoroughly acculturated, western Sephardic brothers teases out the fissures and tensions between these two groups. Again, Ben-Ur mines the Ladino press and the archives of Shearith Israel, as well as an eclectic assortment of memoirs and private correspondence, to present the varied aspects of this fraught relationship and what it tells us about identity, self-perception, language, and tradition.

Ben-Ur sees the relationship between Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews and Ashkenazim as one of "coethnic recognition failure." All too often, Ashkenazim could not imagine the possibility of Jews that did not share in their own cultural traits. Ben-Ur gathers personal and communal examples of the invisibility or unintelligibility of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews to their Ashkenazi neighbors. Ashkenazim were often completely incredulous of the possibility of a Jew not speaking Yiddish; they assumed that Syrian Jews were actually Arabs, or Yemenite Jews African. Ben-Ur clarifies that while Ashkenazi Jews were acutely aware of the differences between their own subgroups—shtetl Jews compared to city Jews, Lithuanians versus Poles, Germans versus Ostjuden—they never denied the Jewishness of their targets of ridicule or scorn. However, for most Ashkenazim, someone who "looked like an Italian, spoke Spanish and never saw a Matsah Ball in [their] life" was difficult to place within their Jewish taxonomy. Ben-Ur looks at how this failure of recognition evolved over time and how the Sephardic community navigated its way into mainstream Jewish culture.

The last chapter is possibly the richest and most illuminating area of Ben-Ur's inquiry. She pinpoints the confluence of several global and local factors that created a unique moment of cultural embrace between eastern Sephardim and the wider Hispanic world. In this chapter we encounter Puerto Rican immi-

grants (then a small minority) enjoying "exotic" delicacies at Sephardi-owned restaurants with names such as *La Luz* and *La Estrella*. Ben-Ur discusses business and social connections forged through shared language between Sephardim and Hispanic immigrants, as well as Jewish Syrian connections with Syrian Christians in early twentieth century New York.

Ben-Ur takes us from the street to the ivory tower when she reconstructs the dynamic relationship between Sephardim and a new wave of Spanish literary scholarship that saw Ladino language and culture as an essential "missing link" of Spanish literary history. Federico de Onís, a path-breaking scholar who came from Spain to Columbia University in 1916, encouraged many Ladino speakers to cultivate and preserve the richness of Judeo-Spanish. Onís established a special unit dedicated to Sephardic studies at his Hispanic Institute at Columbia. For Onís and his circle, Ladino was central to understanding the polychromatic nature of Hispanic culture and history. Many eminent scholars were either directly trained at Columbia or were inspired by the openness of these pioneering scholars to rediscover the treasure of their Sephardic heritage. It is important to keep in mind that this "Hispanic embrace" of the Sephardim was at a time when there were almost no official programs in Jewish studies at U.S. universities and decades before multiculturalism would become a mainstream academic value.

Overall, this is an important, exceptionally well-researched and insightful work. My only criticism is the amount of space Ben-Ur dedicates to justifying her project. She eloquently *gives voice* to the sense of erasure felt by non-Ashkenazi Jews within the wider American Jewish community and within the world of Jewish historiography. This is an important corrective feature of this book. However, the fascinating history she weaves out of a labyrinth of sources and the analytical eye she brings to her subject speaks for itself. This history is justified ultimately by its ability to explore the fissures and complexities of Jewish identities—of pointing out the many competing, complementary, and contradictory identities at play within American Judaism—and their connections to language, faith, economics, and personal experience.

Ronnie Perelis is the Alcalay Assistant Professor of Sephardic Studies at Yeshiva University. His research and teaching focus on the nexus of Hispanic and Jewish culture in Iberia and the New World. He is currently writing a study of family and identity in the Sephardic Atlantic world.

Notes

[1]The notable exception is David Biale's edited volume, *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (New York: Schocken Press, 2002). This anthology enthusiastically embraces the variety and nuance of the wider Jewish world.

Hasia Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), 528 pp.

In this compelling study, Hasia Diner fundamentally challenges the commonly held assumption that American Jews expressed little interest in the Holocaust during the immediate postwar period. Using a wide range of evidentiary materials, she argues that the memory of the Holocaust touched almost every aspect of organized Jewish life in the years after 1945. According to Diner, immediately after World War II, American Jews began to create Holocaust memorials, involve themselves in political activities to benefit survivors, and invoke the genocide of European Jewry when promoting disparate strategies for strengthening Jewish life. They may not have used the term "memorial" when they described their remembrance tributes, but they certainly acted as "memorial builders."

For decades, historians and other scholars promoted the view that a "myth of silence" pervaded American Jewish culture. This formulation suggested that American Jews ignored the Holocaust during the immediate postwar years because a more public commemoration would have clashed with their patriotism and acculturatory ambitions. According to Leon Jick, Nathan Glazer, and others, American Jews were encouraged to speak publicly about the Holocaust only in the 1960s after the Eichmann trial and Israel's victory during the Six Day War. Diner is critical of all scholars who have articulated this view, but she is most disdainful of Peter Novick and Norman Finkelstein, whose books, she asserts, portray contemporary American Jewish interest in the Holocaust as a tactic to encourage Jewish allegiance with the State of Israel.

Over the course of six substantive chapters, Diner persuasively and methodically demonstrates that American Jews established a strong interest in the genocide of European Jewry as early as the waning months of the war. They partook in a culture of remembrance; among other things, they attempted to build physical monuments of varying scales, published memorial books, and created works of theater and art dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust. Yet, as Diner shows, the Holocaust shaped American Jewish culture in ways that lay outside the explicit realm of "memorialization." American Jewish organizations invoked the Holocaust in varying political debates, including those that concerned immigration and the care of the displaced persons, the creation of the State of Israel, and the appropriate postwar relations between the United States and West Germany. They launched research projects to study and record the history of the Holocaust and interviewed survivors in the displaced persons camps and in the United States. Jews later invoked the Holocaust in their commitment to civil rights and to liberalism. Diner's conclusion focuses on the 1960s as she considers how the myth of silence materialized.

Diner's compelling, albeit lengthy, study is an extremely important addition to the literature. Probing and compassionate, it dynamically challenges the myth of silence that has been so durable in popular and scholarly accounts of postwar American Jewish life.

Robin Judd is an associate professor of Jewish and European history at The Ohio State University. The author of Contested Rituals: Circumcision, Kosher Butchering, and the Making of Jewish Politics, 1843–1933*, she currently is working on a project concerning European Jewish women who married American military men after World War II.*

Henry L. Feingold, *Jewish Power in America: Myth and Reality* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Books, 2008), 178 pp.

Henry Feingold's newest book is an incisive and often profound analysis of the illusions and ironies of Jewish political heft in twentieth-century America. As he notes, it is a particularly timely subject when unalloyed American support of Israel is being questioned in various quarters.

An introductory chapter deals with the Jewish Diaspora's lack of "hard power," in contrast to the "soft power" resulting from various means of advocating and persuading (16, 41). In a series of interrelated chapters, he parses five key moments in recent American Jewish history: the failure to act effectively with respect to the Nazi persecutions of the 1930s and the Holocaust; the demand in the 1970s and 1980s that Soviet Jews have the right to emigrate; the Jewish role in American support of Israel; the motives of Jewish youth in the New Left counterculture; and the putative Jewish bias ascribed to "neocons" by some of the critics. These matters are contextualized according to Feingold's insightful, expert, and frequently witty perspective. He offers a masterful account of the failure of New Deal figures of Jewish background (except for Henry Morgenthau in 1944) and of fractious Jewish organizations to mobilize in order to assist European Jews, noting that Roosevelt's awareness of widespread antisemitism in the United States rendered it disadvantageous for him to do anything of substance to rescue them (e.g., 29–30, 41). Contrariwise, Senator Henry Jackson and his political allies latched onto the movement agitating to permit Jews to leave the Soviet Union, in this case expressing a confluence of Jewish concerns and the opposition to the Nixon/Kissinger efforts at détente in some political circles. Feingold's discussion of involvement of Jews in the New Left flashes back to the earlier Americanization of east European Jewish socialist radicalism, including the struggles of the Jewish Old Left with the Communist Party in the twenties and thirties. Calling attention to the difference between "Jewish radicals" whose "tribal bona fides are otherwise unclear" and "radical Jews who search for roots through a Judaic conduit," Feingold emphasizes the persistent and underlying American Jewish proclivity for liberalism (e.g., 140). This in turn allows him to analyze charges that the neoconservatives pushed Jewish

communal interests and that American foreign policy in the Middle East has been captured by a supposedly well-organized "Israel lobby."

This is a book of apercus that illuminate the complex Jewish involvement in the American political process for the last century, with implications for this dimension of Jewish history as a whole. Scholars and Jewish community leaders concerned with Jewish political behavior and attitudes in the American context should read it.

In the long run, according to Feingold, American Jewish power remains "a tenuous, fragile force that is mostly confined to the realm of ideas and values" (xii). Beyond the judicious realism and cool, balanced surface of his analysis are flashes of outrage about the omission of Jews from the "universe of obligation" in the modern world (20), worries about a resurgence of antisemitism—and, as he concedes at the very end, the importance for Jews and Americans of "a basic optimism that progress toward a better world can be achieved" (158).

Robert M. Seltzer is professor of history at Hunter College and the Graduate School of The City University of New York. He is the author of Jewish People, Jewish Thought, *and of many articles on modern Jewish history and thought.*

Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), 381 pp.

This excellent volume, by a historian, examines the history of Orthodox Jews in America from the earliest arrivals in the seventeenth century to the present. More specifically, the work focuses on how Orthodox Jews have coped with the various challenges of religious freedom, economic opportunities, and social integration that America has provided. As Gurock's narrative unfolds, the reader is introduced to the varied lifestyles of Orthodox Jews, as they have sought to remain committed to halakhic traditions and practices while attempting to acculturate into mainstream society. It becomes clear that those positioning themselves under the Orthodox tent—the image used by Gurock—were far from uniform in Jewish observance and efforts at resisting and offsetting assimilative influences of the wider society. Indeed, by the 1870s, almost all of Americanized congregations had veered from Orthodoxy, and their survival was precarious. The critical turning point, it turns out, occurred during the last decades of the nineteenth century following the arrival of many profoundly observant Jews.

The first third or so of the work addresses the challenges that the earliest immigrants faced upon their arrival, particularly as they sojourned beyond the more populated Jewish urban centers along the east coast. The greatest challenge, as revealed in the chapter "Religious Dilemmas of a *Treif* Land," was the drive to succeed economically along with the expectation that, to survive, Jews were often compelled to work on the Sabbath. As revealed in fascinating detail, the late 1800s saw, from various quarters within Orthodoxy, organized

activist efforts to retrieve the younger generation, which had experienced the thrust of Americanization leading to their acculturation and even assimilation. Chapters four through nine examine the key figures in this struggle and the respective claims, strategies, and compromises they endorsed.

To the uninformed, the Orthodox brand of Judaism is fairly uniform. Such a perspective, emphasizes Gurock, masks the heterogeneity characterizing Orthodox Jews' ritual and traditional practices. The chapter titled "Orthodox vs. Orthodox" focuses on how sides within Orthodoxy attend to the impact of modernity on everyday life, notably in views regarding the permissibility of secular education. Whereas to supporters of change, the role of tradition is flexible and must accommodate social change in the surrounding culture, opponents of change, by contrast, view innovations around them as unprecedented deviations from Jewish law. The range of controversies surrounding approaches and reactions to feminism forms the focus of an entire chapter. Another one, "Comfortable And Courted," details how Orthodox Jews are able to remain committed to an Orthodox lifestyle while taking advantage of various amenities the current culture has to offer. And yet, the picture for Orthodoxy is not entirely rosy: While numbers are increasing, on one hand, the potential for expanding dropout rates, even within the most committed of Orthodox communities, has become a problem. As in the past, Gurock observes, Orthodox Jews, as is the case for unobservant Jews, too, will learn to fashion and balance Jewish commitments to suit their needs.

This volume, superbly written and referenced and the product of dense scholarly research, is well worth the read. The history of America's Orthodox Jews is presented, warts and all. While highlighting many of the triumphs of Orthodox Jewry in America, Gurock is also sensitized to another inescapable reality: Included among those that are seemingly committed to the punctilious observance of the Torah's teachings are those who have committed "acts of unethical and even illegal turpitude." The story of Orthodoxy in America is, indeed, multifaceted.

As an ethnographer, I was particularly drawn by the author's prologue and epilogue, which contain valuable insights into his background and enable the reader to appreciate his sensitive sociological insights concerning the relative cohesiveness of the Orthodox community. The Jewish community—Orthodox and other streams, too—is in the throes of consequential change, and Gurock's volume lends valuable insights into how its most ever-expanding segment is managing to cope.

William Shaffir is professor of sociology at McMaster University in Hamilton, Canada. He has published on various aspects of ultra-Orthodox Jewry, including Hasidic Jews, newly observant Jews, and ultra-Orthodox Jews who have left the Haredi fold.

Ira Robinson, *Translating a Tradition: Studies in American Jewish History* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2008), 327 pp.

In distinguishing the fledgling American Jewish Historical Society from The Jewish Publication Society in 1892, Cyrus Adler insisted that the former must "publish at times dry as dust material."(7) Fortunately, Ira Robinson did not heed his subject's advice.

Translating a Tradition: Studies in American Jewish History is an engaging and important contribution to the field. The book compiles Robinson's articles in three sections: on Adler, Orthodox Judaism in North America, and contemporary American Judaism, the last of which consists of a single article on American Jews and so-called "intelligent design."

The first section, "Toward the Biography of an American Jew," places Adler in the context of both American and Jewish history. Adler's background in the secular academy, as an Assyriologist trained at Johns Hopkins, led to his attempt to establish American Jewish history as a modern, scientific discipline. Though he failed to professionalize the field, his efforts reflected his lifelong struggle to reconcile a modern, American sensibility with an unwavering commitment to traditional Judaism as he defined it.

Robinson outlines numerous examples of Adler's balancing act. As a biblical scholar, Adler navigated between an appreciation of source criticism and an acceptance of divine revelation. Adler's dedication to Americanism and Judaism, rather than to secular Jewish ethnicity, antagonized both Yiddishists and Zionists. In a chapter coauthored with Maxine Jacobson, Robinson describes Adler's personal life becoming professional, as he was forced to contend with his wife Racie's early sympathy for Jewish nationalism. Though both Cyrus and Racie preferred Hebrew to Yiddish, they "modeled in themselves a consciously Americanized Judaism," wishing each other a good "Sabbath" (as opposed to Shabbat or Shabbos) every Saturday to demonstrate their "commitment to creating an American Jewish vocabulary." (165)

Adler displayed his commitment to American Judaism most sincerely as president of The Jewish Theological Seminary. Robinson's two essays on this topic attempt to rescue Adler from his reputation as a "sterile bureaucrat" (65) and instead celebrate him as the man who "managed the development of the Conservative movement." (78) Robinson succeeds, pointing to Adler's "knowledge of and belief in the American political system" (79) as his chief tool. Sensing his movement's relative weakness, Adler emphasized common Jewish values and traditions but eschewed rigid ideologies for the seminary. His pragmatism enabled the United Synagogue membership to increase nearly tenfold under his tenure, setting the stage for the Conservative movement's massive postwar growth, when it could "afford the luxury of ideological definition." (81) Adler was "an enabler" (142) who helped build and maintain the institutional face

of a Conservative Judaism that would dominate the American Jewish scene in the postwar era.

After his examination of a leading figure of Conservative Judaism, Robinson's second section highlights the more religiously observant in the American Jewish narrative. Here, too, Robinson shows that a dedication to halakhah did not preclude efforts at modernization. The first Hasidic rabbis in North America came to the United States and Canada in the early twentieth century not because of persecution, but because of the opportunity to lead their own congregations. As opportunists, they resembled other Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants who sailed to the *goldene medinah* (golden land). And despite their self-imposed seclusion, certain *haredim* (ultra-Orthodox) attempted at least some form of integration into the broader Jewish community, if not the American community at large. The Cleveland-based Yiddish writer Samuel Rocker (1864–1936), for example, offered a sanitized version of Hasidism in his stories "in which those elements which would appear most foreign to modern civilization were either suppressed or else de-emphasized," (232) thus placing *haredim* within the American Jewish fold. New York Orthodox Rabbi Moses Feinstein, on the other hand, made peace with the simply "modern" Orthodox, "to cast his net as widely as possible for adherents of halakhic Judaism." (253)

Both Rocker and Feinstein, like Adler, tried to strike a balance between Judaism and Americanism. Though the former figures leaned much more heavily to tradition, they felt stronger bonds with their less observant co-religionists than with American gentiles. In the final two chapters, which deal with Orthodox responses to evolution and American Jewish responses to intelligent design, Robinson demonstrates another area of relative consensus among American Jewry. While numerous Orthodox Jews have tried to make peace with science and religion, intelligent design has not found many adherents in their or any other Jewish community. Indeed, Robinson shows how Orthodox Jews have renounced creationism in an effort to distance themselves from fundamentalist Christians.

Through his essays, Robinson brings to light underappreciated efforts of various Jews who attempted to translate their traditions to an American setting. These informative chapters are unfortunately marred by numerous typographical errors. Despite these flaws in presentation, Robinson's book is an important and effective contribution to the field of American Jewish history.

David Weinfeld, originally from Montreal, Canada, is a doctoral candidate in Hebrew and Judaic studies and history at New York University. He received his bachelor's cum laude in history from Harvard University in 2005.

Barry Seldes, *Leonard Bernstein: The Political Life of an American Musician* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 296 pp.

The political convictions of a typical American Jew in the decades from the beginning of World War II until the end of the Cold War are easy to reduce to generalization. Such a citizen was very likely to be supportive of civil rights and the ideal of racial equality, alert to violations of civil liberties, sympathetic to the left, aghast at the conservative and Republican abuse of power, hostile to the military intervention in Vietnam, and eager to promote international conciliation and dialogue rather than ratchet up tensions that might instigate war. These beliefs constitute the signature of postwar liberalism and are familiar to students of Jewish political behavior.

Among the exemplars of these beliefs was Leonard Bernstein, who was strikingly atypical in the grandeur of his musical gifts, in the fecundity of his imagination, and in the versatility and energy that characterized his career. His impact on the nation's culture was inescapable. As an American Jew, he did not soft-pedal his ethnicity, even as his unprecedented success validated the faith in the national promise of democratic opportunity.

The achievement of Barry Seldes's *Leonard Bernstein: The Political Life of an American Musician* is the revelation of how deeply and consistently politicized the maestro was. The frustration that this well-researched monograph cannot dispel, however, is how wide was the gap between the talent that was invested in the music and the dull predictability that Bernstein brought to political questions. Perhaps an even more peculiar feature of this book is that Seldes seems quite unaware of this disjunction.

Of course, there is no requirement that creativity in one field of endeavor should translate into acuity in another. (A rare exception is Vladimir Nabokov's distinction in both literature and Lepidoptera.) But this volume exhibits surprisingly little curiosity about the sources of the political engagement that marked the course of a lifetime. Seldes fails to directly and explicitly connect Bernstein's willingness to enlist in the movements against racial injustice—and on behalf of the Bill of Rights and antiwar causes—with liberalism's power to reassure the children of immigrants of the fundamental decency of a society that was gratifyingly open to reform. Only Bernstein's abiding and unstinting Zionism is shown to be an obvious consequence of his roots in middle-class Jewish Boston and the assumption that a commitment to the welfare of Israel was perfectly compatible with American citizenship.

A nonverbal art such as music is notoriously difficult to access in terms of moral or religious values. But Seldes has trouble entwining the musical career of his subject with his social vision, other than to offer vague and limited evidence of Bernstein's effort to record both suburban dissatisfaction (as in his opera, *Trouble in Tahiti*) and the postwar malaise of the age of anxiety (Symphony #2). The fault is not entirely Seldes's: *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue*, a musical

with lyricist Alan Jay Lerner, was intended to be a searing critique of slavery and racism and would have been Bernstein's most overt political work—but it bombed on Broadway in 1976 and was not revived.

Drawing on the huge dossier that the FBI so pointlessly compiled at taxpayers' expense, Seldes is at his most illuminating in showing the risks that Bernstein—perhaps unwittingly—took by signing the numerous progressive petitions that circulated in the cosmopolitan, avant-garde circles that he inhabited. The FBI failed in its effort to prove that he was a communist but did manage to get Bernstein blacklisted from CBS for a couple of years. The blacklist was lifted in 1954, when the telegenic conductor first appeared on *Omnibus*, the program that elevated him into one of the most influential of all educators of classical or "serious" music. (In that same year Columbia Pictures released *On the Waterfront*, for which Bernstein composed the haunting, Oscar-nominated score.) A year earlier, the U.S. Department of State had refused to renew his passport, a decision that—if upheld—would have made impossible the opportunity for him to serve as principal conductor of a major orchestra. But Bernstein expressed his remorse for association with communist fronts and causes and got his passport renewed. Four years later, he became principal conductor and then musical director of the New York Philharmonic, and for another decade his politics never got him into trouble. But in 1970, he and his wife hosted a party for Black Panthers, who needed to replenish their legal defense fund. Among those in attendance was the journalist Tom Wolfe, who coined the phrase "radical chic" to discredit such efforts. Bernstein's reputation never quite recovered. Nor, in a sense, did the liberalism that gave rise to that party—that hoped for American democracy to fully absorb a black community that showed increasing signs of radical disaffection, mistrust of Jews, and violence.

Wolfe's satiric article in *New York* Magazine did not mention that the FBI trolled through the social columns of daily newspapers to get the names of the attendees at the Bernsteins' soirée and thus generated files on Americans who did not previously have them. According to Seldes, a COINTELPRO operation was also designed to neutralize Bernstein himself, including gossip items that the agency tried to plant about the homosexuality that he had so carefully concealed. The press was not interested. But any assessment of Bernstein's liberal politics (which included his participation in the Selma-to-Montgomery march in 1965 to accelerate the struggle for voting rights in the South) should take into account what he was up against.

Stephen J. Whitfield is professor of American studies at Brandeis University and the author, most recently, of In Search of American Jewish Culture.

Gerald Tulchinsky, *Canada's Jews: A People's Journey* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 630 pp.

Gerald Tulchinsky, one of Canadian Jewry's preeminent historians, offers us a vital overview of the history of Jews in Canada. Based upon the success of his earlier twin works, *Branching Out: The Transformation of the Canadian Jewish Community* (1998) and *Taking Root: The Origins of the Canadian Jewish Community* (1992), Tulchinsky merges and builds upon these texts to provide a single-volume survey that spans more than two and one-half centuries. The breadth of information, sources, and ephemera utilized is truly remarkable. Clearly, the author's skills as a writer and a historian play an important role in the readability and accessibility of his new book.

Wherever relevant, Tulchinsky responds to the oft-alluded-to but rarely articulated question with which Canadian Jews—and Canadians in general—often grapple: Are we not just a northern version of American history? Tulchinsky successfully illuminates just how different the Canadian Jewish experience is from the American one, despite the obvious similarities and shared perspectives. While many a prewar eastern European Jew rarely distinguished between "America" and "Canada," the development and evolution of the Canadian Jewish community were functions of distinct social, political, and urban combinations that differed from those obtained in the United States.

Tulchinsky does not shy away from internal Jewish strife. When discussing the strikes and labor disruptions that plagued the Canadian textile industry in the 1910s, the author illuminates how Jewish management and labor faced off and the social disruption that ensued. He also exposes the apprehension and lack of understanding Canadian Jews exhibited when facing Holocaust survivors for the first time, and the latter's disappointment in their reception. His knowledge of historical materialism and the important role of industry, labor, and political movements is laudatory, although at times exceedingly detailed. Paralleling leftist ideology with religious fervor, Tulchinsky employs deft metaphors, such as "secular missionaries" (264) and "messianic idealism," (272) to describe the zeal of many communists and socialists. He even riffs on the stirring Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur prayer, *Unetaneh Tokef* (which relates how God will decide who will live and who will die in the upcoming year, and by what means):

> They [the large department and chain stores] were the real titans of the apparel trades, indirectly deciding which firms would live or die—who by sudden bankruptcy, who by slow strangulation, who by labour strife, and who by despair" (262).

Despite the virtues of this volume, there remain some significant lacunae. First, there is no sustained narrative of women's perspective; although mentioned occasionally, women remain secondary elements of the plot. Further,

the author neglects the development of traditionalism among Jews in Canada. His examination of the Orthodox community and its rich history is reductive and, in certain instances, incorrect. For example, he notes that, "Strong efforts in Montreal, Toronto, and Winnipeg to establish a *kehillah* (community) organization, essentially for the supervision of *Kashrut*, were unsuccessful" (214). Despite controversy and strife, both Montreal's and Winnipeg's *Vaad Ha'ir* continue to function well into their ninth decades and cannot be labelled as unsuccessful. As well, the end of the book, in which the author has updated the text to reflect the first part of the twenty-first century, exhibits little of the detailed information of the first part of the book, which focuses on the first half of the twentieth century. And finally, Tulchinksy—like many others—neglects western Canadian experiences in favor of the more populous central and eastern sections of the country.

Despite some reticence about the representativeness of the work, Tulchinksy's one-volume *Canada's Jews: A People's Journey*, will become an important reference and general history of Canada's Jews. This book will certainly serve as an important introduction to Canadian Jewish history.

Steven Lapidus, former co-curator of the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre, is a doctoral candidate in religious studies at Concordia University. While his primary focus is on the history of North American Orthodoxy, he has conducted research and taught on various topics in the study of religion. A recipient of more than a dozen scholarships and awards, he is also the author of several articles, written in both English and French, in the field of Canadian Jewish history. Currently, he is preparing his grandfather's memoirs of life in a pre-World-War-I Ukrainian shtetl for publication.

Mel Young, ed., *Uriah: Uriah Phillips Levy, Captain, USN, and the Naval Court of Inquiry* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009), 107 pp.

As this journal went to press, the AJA learned of the death of Mel Young (1930–2009). We join with his family and friends in mourning his passing.

Uriah Phillips Levy (1792–1862), who commanded a U.S. fleet in the Mediterranean, was the first Jew ever to rise to such a level of command. He is credited by his admirers—and by the tombstone he arranged to be erected at the Shearith Israel Cemetery in Cypress Hills, Brooklyn, New York—for the abolition of flogging in the U.S. Navy, although he was only one of several leaders in the movement and, given his ornery reputation, probably not the most influential. He still holds the navy's record for being court-martialed six times and finally being cleared by two courts of inquiry. Levy was undoubtedly the victim of antisemitic fellow naval officers, but as he was the only Jew in the entire navy known to have endured comparable insults, it is clear from

the testimony at his hearings that his own combative disposition brought out prejudices that otherwise were kept under control.

Readers interested in Levy's life will turn to the fine biography by the late Ira Dye, published in 2006 by the University of Florida Press. Mel Young has reprinted, without any introduction or identification of the people or legal issues involved, much of the record of the court of inquiry of 1857 that led to Levy's exoneration and appointment as fleet commander. A one-page preface with a biblical quotation compares him to the biblical Uriah, whom King David sacrificed, and a blurb on the back cover commends the U.S. Navy for taking action against antisemitism.

It is very useful to have this material in an easily accessible book. However, it would have been helpful if the author had presented the context of the trial. For instance, identifying many of the actors in the trial would have revealed that Levy was closely connected to important people in President James Buchanan's administration (such as Secretary of State Lewis Cass, after whom he named one of his children) and the Democratic party (such as Louisiana Senator Judah P. Benjamin), and that these connections played the crucial role in his reinstatement and promotion. It would also have helped to know that Levy was not singled out for dismissal. He was only one of numerous aged naval officers who had served since the War of 1812 and was the only Jew who suffered dismissal during the Franklin Pierce administration (1853–1857). Scholars who want to study Levy's life and the issues behind his legal troubles in detail need to look at Dye's biography and the entire record, which has been photocopied from the National Archives and is available at the American Jewish Archives of the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, the starting point of any serious inquiry into American Jewish history.

Nevertheless, Young has gathered the most useful excerpts from the trial and presented them in any easy-to-read format. If an instructor provides background material, or a general reader looks into the above-mentioned sources, this book can prove extremely valuable for those interested in Levy's career, and the nature of antisemitism in the United States during the early nineteenth century.

William Pencak is professor of history and Jewish studies at The Pennsylvania State University.

RECENT ARCHIVAL ACQUISITIONS 2009

American Council for Judaism (ACJ)

Minutes, correspondence, and other records of the ACJ. 1942–2008.

Received from Stephen L. Naman, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL

American Jewish Committee (AJC)

Executive papers and subject collections of the AJC, 1943–1980. Includes presidential papers of Irving Engel and Joseph Proskauer, together with files on the AJC's work in civil rights, domestic affairs, education and training, intergroup activities, social action, and AJC administration.

Received from the American Jewish Committee, New York, NY

Anshe Chesed Congregation (Vicksburg, MS)

Sisterhood minutes and other congregational materials. 1917–1933.

Received from Iuliu Herscovici, Vicksburg, MS

Bell, Leonard D.

Papers concerning his work in the United Jewish Appeal, together with material concerning his friendship and work with Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman. 1960–2000.

Received from Leonard D. Bell, Highland Beach, FL

Binder, Abraham W.

Music, mostly handwritten, written and arranged by Binder, musician, cantor, and professor of music at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion. 1924–1969.

Received from Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, New York, NY

Braude, William G.

Audio recording, with transcript, of Rabbi Braude's final remarks to the Temple Beth El (Providence, RI) board of trustees. 19 June 1974.

Received from Leslie Y. Gutterman, Providence, RI

Bronstein, Herbert

Sermons, articles, letters, and other papers of Rabbi Bronstein, rabbi and senior scholar at North Shore Congregation Israel, Glencoe, IL. 1980–2009.

Received from Herbert Bronstein, Glencoe, IL

Clifton Meadows Swim Club (Cincinnati, OH)

Papers concerning a lawsuit against the Clifton Meadows Swim Club by members of the club (led by Judge S. Arthur Spiegel), claiming the club practiced discrimination by not allowing African Americans use of its facilities. 1969–1970.

Received from Lela Ransohoff and James Englert, Cincinnati, OH

Cohen, Joseph and Barton

Papers of Joseph Cohen and his son, Barton, lifelong residents of Kansas City, MO. Papers pertain to their professional work in the fields of law and banking, together with their communal activities in the Kansas City area. 1916–2006.

Received from Mary Cohen, Overland Park, KS

Congregation Ahawath Chesed Shaar Hashomayim (New York, NY)

Minutes of the Society of Righteous Women (Chebra Noshim Zidkonioth). 1902–1923; and minutes of the ladies auxiliary. 1904–1912.

Received from Anne Mininberg, New York, NY

Council for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE)

Records documenting the activities and interests of the organization, including publications, educational programming, correspondence, memos, committee records, financial records, board meeting minutes, bylaws, photographs and recordings from conferences, files on CAJE conferences, board member manuals, and membership information. 1976–2008.

Received from Jeffrey Lasday, New York, NY

Elwell, Susan

Collection of women's and feminist haggadot, including many edited by Rabbi Elwell during her work with the American Jewish Feminist Center and Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project. 1984–2001.

Received from Susan Elwell, Philadelphia, PA

Feinberg, Abraham H.

Papers of Rabbi Abraham H. Feinberg, who served at congregations in Rockford, Illinois, and Youngstown, Ohio, in the 1930s and 1940s.

Received from Eric J. Siroka, South Bend, IN

Foer, Paul M.

Thesis and research notes written and compiled by Paul M. Foer on "Breira: A Project of Concern in Diaspora-Israel Relations." Breira was an organization founded in 1973 by a group of left-leaning Zionist Jews for "the purpose of discussing problems they perceived in Zionism and Israel." 1975–1984.

Received from Paul M. Foer, Annapolis, MD

Freidenreich, Fradle Pomerantz

Collection of materials gathered during the writing of Freidenreich's book, *Passionate Pioneers: Yiddish Secular Education in North America, 1910–1960*. Items in the collection include questionnaires, correspondence, publications, photographs, memorabilia, reminiscences, song books, bibliographies, statistics, evaluations, articles, conference minutes, reports, and school and camp yearbooks. 1910–1960.

Received from Fradle Pomerantz Freidenreich, Herzlia, Israel

Gitelson Family

Papers of the Gitelson family, including Nehemiah Gitelson, Moses Leo Gitelson, Miriam Evelyn Gitelson, Susan Aurelia Gitelson, and Connie Gitelson Gruber. 1880–2008.

Received from Susan Gitelson, New York, NY

Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR)

Documents pertaining to the merger of HUC and JIR. 1949–1956.

Received from Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH

Herman, Erwin L.

Personal and rabbinic papers of Rabbi Herman, a founder (together with his wife Agnes) of The Jeff Herman Virtual Resource Center on Sexual Orientation Issues in Congregations and the Jewish Community, housed at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles, CA. 1950–2005.

Received from Agnes Herman, San Marcos, CA

Holtzmann, Fanny E.

Papers of Miss Holtzmann, primarily concerning her biography, *The Lady and the Law: The Remarkable Life of Fanny Holtzmann*. 1977–1980.

Received from Ellen Propp, New York, NY

Ingber, Abie I.

Recording and transcript of commencement address delivered at Xavier University, Cincinnati, OH. 16 May 2009.

Received from Abie I. Ingber, Cincinnati, OH

Jewish Agricultural Society (JAS)

Records of the Society, consisting of legal papers, contracts, and miscellaneous material pertaining to JAS's assistance of families who set up farms in upstate New York. 1900–1930.

Received from Lewis Glinert, Hanover, NH

Kaelter, Wolfgang

Personal and rabbinic papers concerning his work as a pulpit rabbi, educator, camp leader, and community activist. 1940–2008.

Received from Judi Lentzner, Lakewood, CA

Kanter, Kenneth A.

Audiorecordings of sermons, interviews, and addresses of Rabbi Kanter, including his installation services at Congregation Mizpah (Chattanooga, TN) and Congregation Micah (Nashville, TN). 1983–2008.

Received from Kenneth A. Kanter, Cincinnati, OH

Katz, Emily A.

"That Land is Our Land: Israel in American Jewish Culture, 1948–1967," doctoral dissertation submitted to The Jewish Theological Seminary. 2009.

Received from Emily A. Katz, Irvine, CA

Mecklenburger, Ralph

Slide show prepared in honor of Rabbi Ralph Mecklenburger's twenty-fifth anniversary at Beth El Congregation (Fort Worth, TX). 2009.

Received from Hollace A. Weiner, Fort Worth, TX

Naamani, Israel T.

Newsclippings, posters, and other items concerning Dr. Naamani and the Israel Naamani Memorial Lecture series at the University of Louisville. 1979–2009.

Received from Edward A. Goldman and Roanete B. Naamani, Cincinnati, OH

Newman, Louis

Collection consisting of correspondence and educational materials (including scrapbooks, notebooks, etc.), together with material dealing with institutions that Newman pioneered and led in and around the Boston area, such as Camp Ramah, Akiba High School, the Boston Bureau of Jewish Education, and the Rashi School (a Reform Jewish day school in Boston). 1950–2000.

Received from Miriam Newman, Newton, MA

Passover Project

Series of instructional programs designed to teach non-Jews about the holiday of Passover and its observance, taught by Cincinnati rabbis and faculty of the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion. 2000.

Received from David T. Feldstein, Fairfield, OH

Pelli, Moshe

Personal papers, mostly concerning his research into Hebrew culture in America. The papers include flyers, newsletters, calendars, interviews, and material on Hebrew cultural activities gathered from early American Hebrew periodicals. 1916–1995.

Received from Moshe Pelli, Orlando, FL

Polier, Justine Wise and Shad

Collection of phonograph recordings of radio interviews and addresses of Justine Wise Polier and Shad Polier covering subjects of civil rights, foreign affairs, social work, adoption, and legal matters. Collection also includes one recording of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise accepting an award in March 1949. 1948–1964.

Received from Trudy Festinger, New York, NY

Rabinowitz, Clara Greenhut

Transcript of personal diaries, 1908–1912, together with digital images of her 'line-a-day' diaries. 1929–1979.

Received from Alan Rabinowitz, Seattle, WA

Ransohoff, Daniel J.

Correspondence from various political and civic leaders, including Potter Stewart, Robert A. Taft, and Hubert Humphrey. 1949–1967.

Received from Regine Ransohoff, Cincinnati, OH

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC)

Records of the RAC dating from its founding. Includes administrative records together with files and correspondence of Rabbi Richard Hirsch and Rabbi David Saperstein. Also includes case files concerning RAC's advocacy of and involvement in major domestic and international issues of political, cultural, social, and economic importance. 1960–2009.

Received from David Saperstein, Washington, DC

Thal, Leonard R.

"Rabbi Lenny Thal: A Tribute," prepared by the Union for Reform Judaism. 2008.

Received from the Union for Reform Judaism, New York, NY

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